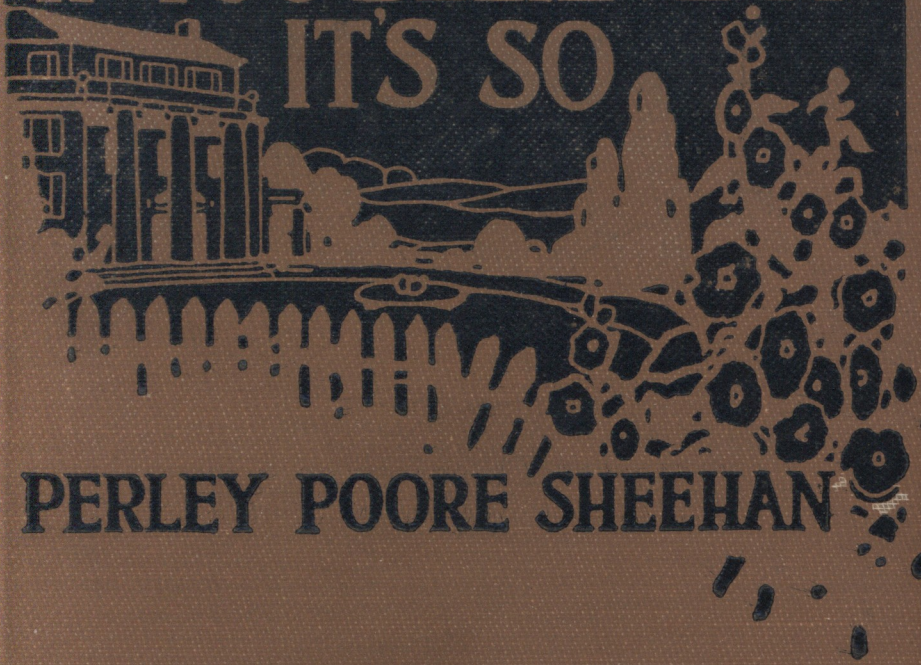
IF YOU BELIEVE IT- IT'S SO



PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

"He's the finest man in the world," the girl flamed from the midst of her trouble.

IF YOU BELIEVE IT, IT'S SO

BY
PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

ILLUSTRATED BY
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TO

A. W. S.

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"Honest and on the level, how long do you think it's goin' to be before you all get yours?" . . . 53

"But, Chicky," said the old man; "I wasn't tryin' to hornswaggle you. Hain't I said all along we were splitting fifty fifty?" 311

IF YOU BELIEVE IT, IT'S SO

CHAPTER I

LOST MONEY

LATE afternoon, and the usual ebb and flow, backwash and cross-currents of humanity in the Grand Central Station. The complication was rendered still more complex by the thousands of commuters leaving for their homes in the suburbs, by yet thousands of other suburbanites arriving for a dinner in town and an evening at the theater. A muffled hubbub filled the place, somewhat like that one hears in a concert hall when a big orchestra is settling into place—all the instruments more or less in tune, yet emitting different notes, some of them high and some of them low, some of them tiny and shrill and some of them hugely vibrant.

"*Kiss Mabel for me and tell her*——"

"*Ah'll kerry yo' beggage.*"

"*Great guns! We've missed*——"

"*There now, I'll be back.*"

And then a diversion, not very loud, not very noticeable in that vast concourse:

"*My money! It's gone! I—I've lost my money.*"

Not much louder and not much more noticeable, say, than the crushing of a Stradivarius would have been; but a disaster of equal import, to judge by the quality of the speaker's voice and the appearance of the victim himself.

He was an elderly man, still broad and powerful, yet with shoulders manifestly stooped with years of hard work. He had a rugged, kindly face, in which there were soft tints of pink and brown; clear, blue eyes, in which, even now, there was more of kindly innocence than consternation. For the rest, he was very clean, freshly shaved, and dressed in his Sunday clothes.

He had been carrying a large but not very full valise of imitation black leather. He had placed this on the polished stone floor at his feet while he used both hands to search his pockets. He stood right in the middle of one of the main drifts of mixed humanity hurrying to and from the trains.

"What will mother say? She told me to be keerful!"

Perhaps a hundred—two hundred—pedestrians passed him by, no more conscious of his existence than they would have been of any other obstacle to be automatically avoided.

Then, an undersized messenger-boy paused and looked at him with detached interest. Two Hunkies, outward-bound for a labor-camp and still with an hour or so to wait, also decided to become spectators. Three small children, with eyes like robins, lingering on their way to the drinking-fountain, forgot their thirst. This was the audience that the old man addressed.

"I wouldn't mind it so much—I suppose whoever finds it will bring it back—but it wasn't really ours."

He was panting as he said it. He had pushed back his broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, and a fine sweat was already making his white hair stick to his temples. There was no mistaking his desperation, yet he sought to cover this with a smile.

"Yuh'd better look out," said the messenger-boy, with a lurch of sly wisdom, "er they'll be swipin' yer grip."

Even this small nucleus of a crowd, however, had now been sufficient to attract others from the shuttling throngs—commuters still with a minute to spare, a porter or two, prospective diners, idlers, they that had just said good-by to friends.

In the midst of this growing crowd the old man still stood there stricken, a little dazed, taking account of his pockets. He had a big, clean handkerchief in one of his hands, and this was constantly getting into his way. He worked a large, old-fashioned snap-purse from a trouser-pocket and opened this and peered into it and then forgot to put it back.

The crowd, enthralled, began to vocalize:

"*'Smatter, pop?*"

"*What's he advertisin'?*"

"*Somebuddy's gypped his roll.*"

"*You should worry. Come on 'r we'll miss the five ten.*"

A special policeman, soft-spoken, smooth as oil, came through the crowd without visible effort, and reached the old man's side.

"What appears to be the trouble?"

While the old man explained, the man in uniform made a slight signal to a regular policeman who was drawing near.

"Come on now," said the regular cop, as he began to shoo the crowd away. "Move along. They ain't nothin' happened. Come on, now. Move—al-long!"

And the crowd was drifting into motion again, its interest already on other things.

"*Did you see what the Reds done in the third?*"

"*Yeh, she's beginning to talk. Says: 'Dada! Dada!'*"

"*Oscar win——*"

"*But, my Gawd, Louis, she's not over seventeen!*"

The old man looked at the two policemen, the special and the regular.

"Mother—Martha—she's my wife," he recommenced, breathlessly, apologetically, with contrition and grief, "she 'lowed I'd better have it sewed in my pocket. She's generally right."

Had he received a bullet through the chest he would have looked like that—breast heaving, the color draining from his face, his mild eyes those of one who confronts the ultimate catastrophe. He made a mighty effort to pull himself together. He touched his temples with the wadded handkerchief. He was grasping for familiar realities to hold him up.

"Mr. Dale—he's the president of our bank—told me I'd—better let him send a draft."

He was speaking only with the utmost difficulty.

"Mother—she thought so, too—only—she wanted

me to see New York—again. Been working pretty steady. Hadn't seen the place for thirty years."

By one of those peculiar shifts in the human whirlpool of the railroad terminus, the recent vortex where they stood was now almost completely quiet. Over there, fresh passengers and clinging friends were huddling for the departure of a great express. Nearer, an iron gate opened and at once, like the waters of a sluice, the people flowed away in yet another current.

"Maybe you got it in your hip-pocket," said the regular policeman with practical sympathy.

The old man made another examination, fumbling, hopeless, yet thorough.

"I got my purse," he said. "It ain't that—but the wallet."

The wallet, it appeared, was old; one that his daughter had given him years ago. He spoke of this daughter as "our little girl." No, it didn't have his name on it, but he'd recognize it anywhere—about eight inches long by four wide, and the leather used to be red, but now was a sort of shiny brown. He could have told it blindfolded, he had handled it so much. He could almost recognize it by its smell—like old, blind Rex, a worn-out, ancient dog of his back home.

The special officer disappeared in the direction of the train-shed. The policeman was taking notes.

Of all those who had been lingering there—the typical New York crowd, amateurs of emotion—only two remained. One was the messenger-boy who had originally discovered the sensation. Mere profundity of thought, rather than an active interest, seemed to be

holding him. It wouldn't have been so easy to guess what held the other onlooker there.

He was a strangely handsome youth, this other—a little too handsome, almost, with classic features, large, dark eyes, a general expression of alert but brooding intelligence; only, a closer look revealed a certain unwholesomeness about him, such as comes to both men and plants that lack sufficient sunshine. So it was with his clothes—almost too elegant, and yet, if scrutinized, showing a certain note of cheap luxury and underlying shabbiness.

This youth strolled away a dozen steps. He came back again. He took casual note of others who came and went. And sometimes this was with an all-but-imperceptible start, as if he recognized them, or saw something about them that pricked his interest. But, again and again, his attention reverted to the old man who had lost his money.

The special policeman returned from the train-shed, reporting the result of an inquiry: "I guess it's a larceny, all right."

"Guess we'd better go with him to the desk, Bill," the regular policeman proposed.

"I don't yet," the old man gasped miserably, "see how it happened."

"Happens every day," the special replied with Stoic philosophy. "Don't it, Joe? This way, sir. First, you'll want to make a complaint."

"Yes, and sometimes twice a day if not oftener," Joe cheerfully averred.

"Hey, youse's fergittin' yer grip," the young messenger called out.

"Well, just see!"

The old man took the grip from the boy's hand, but immediately set it down again. Once more he opened the ancient purse that had been spared him. He, trembling, opened this. He sought a coin. The messenger's lethargic face assumed an expression of astute expectancy.

"Here's a nickel for you, bub. I suppose I really should give you more."

The messenger was not averse, but the law intervened.

"Gwan, now; beat it," Joe advised; and the messenger skipped away—not intoxicated, precisely, but mollified.

The two officers and he who had lost his money—his broad old shoulders a trifle more bent than ever—started off in the direction of the precinct police-station. The young man—he of the dark eyes—appeared to hesitate. He came to a decision.

He started in pursuit.

CHAPTER II

AS AMONG FRIENDS

"ELEVEN hundred dollars, Mr. Officer," the old man was saying to the chubby-faced lieutenant back of the high desk. The official bent and wrote, his face shining redly in the electric light. From the midst of his labors he rumbled.

"Name?"

"Ezra Wood."

"Address?"

"Rosebloom—this State. We've lived there, mother, and me, for nigh onto sixty years."

"Was it before, or after, you got off the train——"

"After, I reckon; right after, Mr. Officer. You see, I was sort of thinking about the folks at home, and what my wife said about me being keerful. I touched the wallet in my pocket. It was there. She says to me something about New York not being like Rosebloom; but we're all born of women, have our troubles——"

"Notice any one specially who might 've taken it?"

"Done what, sir?"

"Why, took your roll——"

"You mean—I was robbed?"

He'd taken off his hat as soon as he entered the

high bare room of the police-station, and he stood there now uncovered—his silky, white hair stirring a little in the draft of the place, his benignant face graven deep with lines of pain and patience and simple goodness. The official light shone down upon him, covering him with a halo. And such a different picture did he make from those usually presented by the strangers who stood before this unholy judgment-seat, that most of the policemen who passed through the room paused there to listen.

Anyway, it was at an hour when there wasn't much to do—a new detail just gone on duty, the old platoon coming in. It was to the room at large, and those who listened there, as much as to the lieutenant back of the high desk, that the old man addressed himself when he next spoke. He had raised his face. There was a new calm and a new courage there.

"I suppose it's all for the best," he labored. He had a fleeting breath of hope. "Maybe it wasn't stolen after all. I've always been kind of absent-minded about letting things lay around. Maybe some one will find it—give it back."

"Maybe," droned the lieutenant, with the flicker of an eyelid at those who were standing by. "We're going to try to find it for you, cap; but they said it, all right, all right, when they told you that this burg ain't no Rosebloom. The train and the whole platform over there at the depot has been searched, and you can bet your life, after what you've said, your roll ain't among the stuff they find. If it was, we'd have heard about it before this. The depot staff's all right.

They've got to be. We got 'em trained. You've been rolled by a dip—had your pocket picked."

"You must know, Mr. Officer."

"I'll get this report down to headquarters"—and he passed the thing he had written to a sergeant—"and if your crook's to be got they'll get him."

"I'd hate to think I had something to do with sending any one to the lockup."

"That's where he'll go," the lieutenant laughed. "Say, if he's lucky, that guy'll get only about fifteen years."

"But we don't know how he was tempted. Perhaps he was hungry, and old, was driven to it."

Some half-dozen policemen were in the room by this time. The old man's presence and the lieutenant's indulgent mood had relaxed discipline just a trifle. There was a gurgle of derision. One of the policemen turned to the dark-eyed youth who had lingered near.

"Ain't he a sketch?" the policeman inquired. "Don't want to do nothing now to the gink that nicked him."

The youth of the dark eyes smiled. He knew many policemen. But he didn't speak. He brooded. He watched. He listened.

"Fergit it," the lieutenant was advising, jovially. "It wasn't no old geezer turned this trick. This is the work of some fresh young boy. The big town keeps turnin' 'em out faster 'n we can trim 'em. Of course, sooner or later, we make the pinch."

"A young man?"

"Sure! They're the only kind that can work New York; and even they slip up—and then, good night!"

"I don't believe that I could send a boy to prison—right at the beginning of his career—to break his mother's heart."

"Well, what do they do when they catch a crook up in your part of the world?"

"There be none. No, sir! Not in Rosebloom. We raise our boys and girls to be God-fearing citizens, up there. Oh, the boys'll take a few apples, now and then; but that ain't stealing. And I suppose the girls are about like all other girls—poor little, innocent things. But nobody locks their doors up there. Every one trusts every one else—lends a hand in case of misfortune."

"Say," the lieutenant exclaimed, with an eye on his audience, "if I ever got located in a burg like that, believe me, I'd stick! What did you leave it for, with all that money?"

"It was foolish of me," the old man answered, gently. "But that money was owing on a mortgage for nigh two-score years. Mother and I borrowed it from old Major Higginbotham at the time our little girl took sick. And then, when the first mortgage ran out at about the time the old major died, and we weren't in a position to clear it off, why, we renewed it with the major's son—that's Mr. Edgar Higginbotham—and he's been carrying it ever since. I wanted to see him—tell him how much mother and I appreciate his kindness. You see, hard as we'd try, we weren't always quite ready to meet the payments. Our little girl died—a beautiful and saintly creature—when she was barely thirty. But the Lord's been good to us. He has.

We've done better these past six years—put by more'n a thousand dollars. This eleven hundred dollars was the last we owed."

He halted in what he was saying. He stood there with his mouth open as if he wanted to say something more.

"Now what do you know about that?" the policeman in the back of the room whispered hoarsely to the dark-eyed youth.

"Some yarn!" the youth answered from the corner of his mouth.

It was a barely audible whisper that came from Ezra Wood:

"Stand fast in the faith! Stand fast in the faith! I will, O Lord; but—will Martha be able to bear it?"

"You don't want to take it so hard," said the lieutenant with kindly intent. "Why, somebody's gettin' theirs every time the clock ticks, here in New York."

He turned a leaf of the official blotter. He read:

"'*Mamie Marcin, white, eleven, run over by brewery-truck, both legs fractured, internal injuries. Bellevue.*'

"'*Gus Pemberton—and so forth—lacerations—probably blinded.*'

"'*Max Mendelbaum, attempted suicide, arrested*——'

"'*Body unidentified girl*——'

"Get me?" the lieutenant demanded. "That sort of stuff day in and day out, every day in the year, Sundays and all."

"The Lord have pity on us all!" said Ezra Wood, bracing himself like a soldier shaking his pack into

place. "In my own trouble I forgot about the trouble of others."

"That's all right," said the lieutenant. "You got your troubles, all right. So's every one else that goes up against this town. Y' understand? Unless they're tough like an elephant, which a lot of 'em are, or strong like hairy gorillas, or slick like the snakes in the zoo—they all get theirs! Either that, or you've got a brain on you like Thomas A. Edison, or a good thing, like me old friend, John D. Get me? Because, if you ain't, sooner or later, this big town's going to eat you alive."

"The Lord have pity on us all!" Ezra Wood repeated. "I suppose my loss is nothing—only—only, you see——"

"Uncle," the lieutenant said, more softly, with a burst of unprofessional sympathy, "if I was you, I'd go and get something to eat and then lay me down for a good night's sleep. There ain't nothing you can do. Leave it to us. Cheer up. Say, we'll have the commissioner himself on the job. If your roll's to be got, we'll get it. Won't we, boys?"

"Surest thing you know."

"We're wit' you, lute."

"I can't tell you how I appreciate your kindness," said Mr. Wood. "I told mother—Martha—that's my wife—we've been married nigh onto fifty years—that folks down here were no different from our folks up in Rosebloom. I wish that you gentlemen—any of you—could pay us a visit some time. We'd give you a royal welcome."

"Get that?" whispered the policeman in the back of the room. "Peeled of all he's got sooner'n he can get out of the depot, and yet he comes back wit' an all-round invite to pay him a visit."

The youth of the dark eyes appeared to be too absorbed to answer. He was listening, one would have said, with a sort of fascination.

"You're all to the good," the lieutenant averred. And he so far forgot official dignity as to come around from the other side of the desk. "Now doncha weaken. We're on the job."

"And I appreciate your advice. I'm still a little dazed. Let's see. I've got three dollars—minus a nickel—and my return ticket home. Maybe you can recommend some modest sort of place where I could get a room."

The lieutenant meditated, but not for long.

"Tim," he said, "you got to pass the Boone House. Suppose you show cap, here, where it is. You can get a room there for a dollar," he enlightened Ezra Wood; "and sleep hearty, without fear of nobody going through your clothes." He had an afterthought. "Of course," he added, "there ain't no bath goes with the room."

"That's all right," said old Mr. Wood; "I took a bath before I come."

"And in the mean time," the lieutenant added, "if anything breaks, I'll let you know."

"The Lord bless you, Mr. Officer," said Ezra Wood, "and all you gentlemen. You know the old saying: 'No kind thing was ever done in vain.'" He turned

again to the lieutenant and gripped the officer's outstretched hand. "And I hope you'll thank the commissioner for me. You tell him how sorry I am to give him this extra trouble. Only, you see, we'd worked so hard for that money, and skimped, and strove, and we'd waited so long for this time to come, and thinking we could sort of let up a little, and not have anything more to worry about——"

"I getcha," the lieutenant murmured.

"And now New York's taken it. New York! New York!" It was almost a sob, but the cry was soft. "You're right. New York lives on what it takes from the country. And its fodder ain't only the wheat and the corn and the fruit that we send to it, either; but our faith and our hopes!—our dreams and our children! Where'd you come from?" he suddenly demanded, whirling on the lieutenant.

"Galway, Ireland!"

"And you?"

"Three Rivers, Michigan."

"And you?"

"Iowa."

He flamed his questions at the various policemen standing there, and they answered him.

"And you?"

His eyes for a moment gleamed into those of the strange youth who had followed him here from the station.

"I was born here," the young man said.

"What are you doing? What are your dreams?

What are your ideals? What is this town doing to you?"

The old man didn't await an answer. After a fashion the questions had been answered as soon as asked by the boy's silence and the look in the boy's face.

"That's it," Ezra Wood intoned with a soft but surprising intensity. "That's it. That's what New York does—takes a little dream, or an ambition, or an ideal—from Galway, or Michigan, or Iowa—and breaks its legs! Lacerates and blinds—— The body of an unidentified girl! Fresh young boys!—flung into the hopper of asylums and prisons! 'Tain't mere money I am grieving for. Only—only——"

" 'Twas all he had!"

"Only, when it was lost—taken from me—stolen—those 'leven hundred dollars that were our sweat and our blood; but, most of all, *her* sweat and *her* blood, and she a helpin' every one that needed help, and comfortin' the afflicted——" He broke off. "I forget myself," he said with dignity. "You'll not forget to thank the commissioner."

CHAPTER III

INTO THE NIGHT

EVEN at this early hour there was something gruesome in the quality of the night. The day had held a promise of spring, but now the wind had shifted around to the northeast, bringing with it a dampness and a chill. The poorest of the city's workers were hurrying home—the men and women, and the girls, who work on through to six and half-past six in the shops and factories.

There is a lightness and a joy about a good many of those workers who leave their tasks at five. They still have a residue of strength and gaiety. Those who quit at half-past five are always duller, sadder, with still less power to react from the drudgery just ended. But those who quit their jobs still later are the utterly forlorn, the utterly fatigued.

These flowed eastward now a black and turgid current. The current gave tongue and spoke with all the languages of the world, but through the babble there was always an undertone of weariness.

"Is it always like this?" asked Ezra Wood.

"It is at this hour," said Tim, the policeman who himself was almost as gray and old as the man from Rosebloom. "'Tis what the lieutenant said it was—a slaughter-house for body and soul."

"You've stood it, friend," said Ezra Wood.

"I have," said Tim, "by the grace of God!"

The Boone House was a little old-fashioned hotel on one of the side streets just off Third Avenue. There was a plate-glass window to either side of its sooty entrance. One of these revealed the office and sitting-room, where sad gentlemen, respectable but homeless, sometimes sat. The other window, partly curtained, was that of the once almost-famous Boone House restaurant, which still did a fairly good occasional trade. But, despite the vicissitudes that had come to the old hotel, it looked good to Ezra Wood, and his heart warmed again in gratitude to the friendly police.

"I thank you, sir," he said, shaking hands with the old officer who had shown him the way; "and I hope you'll tell the lieutenant not to worry too much if he is unable to recover the money."

Officer Tim looked at the other gravely for a dozen seconds.

"I'll tell him," he said. "And I've got a feeling that 'twill be all right with you, most likely in some way we can't foresee."

Himself like a strange fish in the home-flowing current of workers, that youth with the dark eyes who had already followed the old man of Rosebloom to the police-station had set out to follow him again. He also noticed the chill and the darkness of the night. For that matter, he noticed also—as if he were seeing it now for the first time—the heavily undulating drift

of workers. Their voices reached him—Yiddish and Greek, Italian, Slovak, and Hun—but he found that he was translating all this into the things he had heard the lieutenant and the old man say:

"*Even they slip up—and then good night!*"

"*The Lord have pity on us all!*"

"*This big town's going to eat you alive.*"

He kept Ezra Wood and the policeman in sight, although he knew that there was no necessity for doing this. He knew where they were going. Only, he seemed to derive some benefit from the mere spectacle of the old man. After a manner, he was like a boy who follows a circus parade—fascinated, getting visions of a world unknown, yet conscious all the time that he's going to get home late for supper.

He turned into the splotched illumination of Third Avenue not far behind the two old men. He paused. He stared for a moment into a pawn-broker's window. Overhead, an Elevated train thundered on its way to Harlem. The surface-cars screeched. The crowds flowed by on foot. He started to follow again.

He was at the office-window of the Boone House when the policeman was recommending the citizen of Rosebloom to the clerk, and tarrying there for a few more words.

The old man had taken off his hat again, his white hair shining through the dimness.

"Good night!" the youth exclaimed under his breath, and he was off in the direction of Third Avenue, going fast, at first, then more slowly, more slowly yet, until he came to an indecisive halt. What was the matter

with him? What was biting him anyway? "Good night," he murmured again—like a *sesame* against the spell that was holding him. But instead of wavering forward he wavered back.

The next time that he looked into the front windows of the Boone House he saw that the old man was eating his supper in the restaurant. It occurred to the youth that he himself was hungry. Why not eat here? He lingered at the entrance. He again walked away swiftly, but dwindled off to a standstill.

He had to eat! He was ravenous.

There was an oyster-booth on the corner of the avenue, and presently he had given his order here for a couple of sandwiches. But scarcely had he taken a bite out of the first sandwich than he found that he wasn't so hungry after all. He paused to think and forgot to chew. He wished he hadn't ordered anything at all.

While he stood there, an old, old woman, dressed in black and very dirty, crept up with the unction of a hungry cat.

"Have a sandwich?" said the youth.

A slow smile came into her puckered face. Her breathless voice had an echo of sweetness in it.

"It's been a long time," she said, "since a young gentleman's invited me to dine."

She was still smiling as she hid the proffered sandwich under her shawl.

"Here's a buck to go with it," said the youth.

She accepted the dollar with the same smiling suavity and rewarded him with the gleam in her rheumy old

eyes. And she was telling him something again—an intimate confession of sorts that called for an occasional grimace of modesty on her highly informed old mask. But he didn't hear her—for two reasons. One reason was that the Elevated trains and the screeching cars made a din that smothered her voice. The other reason was that, louder yet, came the lieutenant's words:

"*They all get theirs!*"

Like this old dame, like so many others he had known, like a projection of himself in the no-distant future.

The old lady was still mumbling autobiographical bits—with the oysterman for audience now; only, the oysterman, having heard many old ladies like this hold forth on similar themes, was not listening particularly—when the youth started off down Third Avenue.

He went as far as the next corner. He stopped there to let an auto pass—and found himself unable to go on—his impulse gone—invisible hands upon him to turn him back once more in the direction he had come.

"Suppose I telephone!"

He meditated this. He knew that there wasn't a chance in a million of the old man's going out. Yes, this was the idea. Maybe, like that, he'd raise the curse that had put the nippers on him.

There was a cheap little tobacco-shop, a few doors away, with a blue telephone sign on its window.

"But what'll I say?"

He entered the place. He bought a package of

cigarettes. He took his time about lighting one of these. With an impulsive, clinching movement, he turned to the telephone-book and opened it.

" 'Boone—Boone House'—and I'm a nut!"

He squared his flat and shapely shoulders. He arched his neck, pulled in his chin. He strode on out of the place, and, at the door, almost bumped into the old lady of the oyster-booth. She peered up at him. Perhaps she didn't recognize him at all, but she smiled at him, graciously, with the echo of an ancient graciousness.

And what was that the old man had said about—"No kind act——"

He bit his cigarette in two. He hurled it to the sidewalk. This was certainly fierce. And here he was, once more, in the street that had called him.

Ezra Wood had gone up to his room in the Boone House. It was a large room, as New York hotel rooms go. It was on the third floor, with a certain air of faded splendor about it—and if he could have a room like this for a dollar, possibly he might have got a room that was good enough for fifty cents; but he didn't like to ask, now that they had taken the trouble to give him this one. And, besides, there was no telling when he would receive a visitor from headquarters—perhaps from the commissioner himself.

He would have liked to go to bed at once, but he scarcely dared. He wondered how long he ought to wait up.

The room was in the rear, with two windows in it

that commanded a dim vista of neighboring yards and the backs of houses, and the glimmering lights of these; and the human noises that came from them —of speech, and laughter, and squabbling quarrels— all fretted the strings of his homesick heart with a heavy hand.

He had taken off his boots and his coat, and drawn one of the squashy old chairs up to a window he had opened. And he seated himself there—smelling the night, hearing its strange squeals and thunders, yet battling himself betimes to overcome the mounting tumult in his breast. The thing to do, he argued, was to be brave and strong, to "stand fast in the faith."

But he moaned: "Oh, God Almighty!"

His mind came reeling back to a consciousness of present things.

Some one was knocking at the door.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

"Come in, sir! Come right in!" said Ezra Wood. "I was sort of expecting you. Although I don't look it," he added, apologetically, with reference to his undress.

He could see that the young man in the hall was not a member of the hotel-staff, although the light was dim, for the stranger wore a hat—one of those velours hats, with the brim pulled down on one side. The light in the hall was dim, and the hat further shaded the stranger's face, all of which gave him a certain air of mystery. But detectives were men of mystery. The touch of mystery was heightened by the stranger's reticence. He appeared to be in no hurry to come in. There, for a fleeting moment or so, he seemed to be on the point of betaking himself away.

"Be you waiting for some one else?" Mr. Wood inquired.

The Boone House was not one of those hotels which announce the arrival of visitors. There was no way of telling whether there was one or two.

What was that the stranger said? It was a sibilant whisper at the best, inarticulate. Anyway, he was inside; and, once inside, he lost no time. While Mr.

Wood was still closing the door, with patient effort, for the lock was somewhat out of order, the stranger went swiftly to the window that was closed and drew the blind, then went with equal speed, smoothly, without noise, to the window that was open. There he paused for a pair of seconds, close to it, but a little to one side, looking out. Then he closed the window and lowered the shade.

All this in the time that it had taken the elder man to close and latch the door.

"Did you come from the commissioner, or did the lieutenant ask you to come?" Mr. Wood inquired. "In any case, I'm glad to see you. Won't you make yourself comfortable?" And he motioned to a chair.

As yet, both of them were standing; and, like that, they certainly made a very striking contrast—old Ezra Wood, his white hair uncovered and slightly ruffled, his bent old frame loosely clad in black, except for his white shirt-sleeves and his gray, home-knitted socks; and then this stranger—slender, dark, shabbily dapper from his velours hat on down to his pointed, light-tan, cloth-top shoes. He still wore his hat. From under it his dark eyes gleamed.

Mr. Wood was willing that his guest should take his own time about speaking. He was eager to put the young man at ease. He pulled a heavy old gold watch from his vest-pocket and carefully opened it—not noticing the visitor's glance of avid interest.

"What's the time?" the young man asked.

"It is now—just eight o'clock."

"I didn't know it was so late."

He spoke like a man who has but a moment to stay.

"That's the hour," said Mr. Wood with calm decision. "This watch is a marine-chronometer. My uncle sailed his ship thrice around the globe and no end of times to China and back with this to go by."

"What's it worth?"

"It's priceless to me because of him who owned it—reminds me of him, true-running, never-failing, a masterpiece of gold and steel. Let's see! The store price? Oh, maybe five hundred—maybe six hundred dollars. Like to look at it?" He undid the watch from its guard. He passed it over. "Sit down! Sit down!"

The stranger slid down to the edge of a chair. He put his hat on the floor. He had taken the watch and he studied it—while Ezra Wood benignantly studied him. The benignant gaze did not falter when the youth suddenly shifted his eyes, but not his position, and saw that he was being observed.

"You're sort of young, my boy, for police work," said Ezra Wood. "Don't it keep you out a good deal at night?"

"Sure!"

"How do you like it?"

"I can't kick."

"You certainly have some agreeable associates. How does your mother like it?"

"What?"

"Your work."

"Whose mother? My mother?"

"Yes."

"I ain't got no mother. My mother's dead."

"Ah?"

"Here, take your watch back. What you want to do—lose it—like you lost your roll?"

"Son"—it was a question that had been storming the mind and heart of old Ezra Wood ever since he heard the knock at the door—"have you brought me any word?"

The youth hesitated. He flashed a smile. He scowled a look of annoyance.

"Say," he demanded, in a husky whisper, "what do you suppose I come here for?"

Ezra Wood didn't appear to notice the irony of the question. He accepted it as a blow to his immediate hopes. He was resigned. He was calm. He took a brief interval for a mental and moral readjustment.

"I was hopin'," he said, stress of emotion causing him to be less careful of his speech than usual, "I was hopin'," he repeated. He was the homesick old farmer bewildered amid strange surroundings. From not very far away came the shaking roar of an Elevated train. A phonograph scraped shockingly at a Sousa masterpiece. Beyond the zone of back yards a man and a woman howled at each other in a frenzy of hate. There was a crash of glass, a shriek, then comparative silence. "I'm sorry you've lost your mother," he concluded.

If the youth himself felt any sorrow, he gave no sign of it. Anyway, his mind was elsewhere.

"What do you suppose I come here for?" he repeated.

"There was only one thing that could have brought you."

"You're gettin' wise."

There was another pause for reflection. The old man must have noticed the closed windows, the drawn blinds. In his mental survey of the hotel he must have perceived how easily any stranger could have gained access to his door as this one had done.

"Son," said Ezra Wood, blandly, kindly, "you seem to be unhappy about something or other. You seem to be holding something back. I don't want you to feel put out on my account. It ain't the first time that I've sort of had to fall back on the Lord for strength and consolation. He'll take care of us, mother and me. He always has. Now, maybe it's something that's happened to you. I'm an old man; but, lah! I ain't forgotten the days of my own youth—wild days—mad days—days when I let the devil get the better of my judgment. Is your father living?"

"Naw!"

"Be you all alone?"

"Sure!"

"If it ain't asking too much, what church do you go to?"

"Who—me?"

"Well, never mind. I suppose the Lord's everywhere—here in New York the same's up in Rosebloom. That's what made me think you brought me some word. Funny; ain't it? But I've noticed it time and again—when something or other had happened that seemed just a leetle more'n I could stand—I'd get a

sudden feeling of relief, comforting, consoling, and I'd know that things were straightening out. Ever have that happen to you?"

"I got to beat it," said the youth. "I got a date. I didn't know it was so late. I just wanted to see if you was here."

"What did you say your name was?"

"Harris."

"What's your first name?"

"Charley."

"Charley Harris, eh? Well, Charley, I don't want to be keeping you, but I'm mighty glad you called. I'm an old man. I was feeling pretty lonely. Son, are you quite sure I can't help you in some way or other? What appears to be ailin' you?"

The youth had seized his hat and risen to his feet. The old man remained seated. He gave the boy a glance. Then, deliberately, thoughtfully, took his watch from his pocket again and slowly began to wind it.

A keen observer might have noticed a slight, lurching movement on the part of the visitor. His dark eyes had gone to the timepiece with that same avid flicker of desire that had been there before. But all this was very fleeting, barely perceptible.

"I just wanted to see if you was here," he repeated.

"Most of the folks are in bed by this time back home," the old man mused. "Another day done—crickets chirpin', wind in the trees, night smellin' of dew and early bloom. I suppose it was thinkin' of all that, and then what the officer said over to the station-

house about what's goin' on here in this great city, that made me realize our blessings."

He was still speaking like that, absorbed, as the youth silently, stealthily crossed the room in the direction of the door. The old man hadn't noticed him. The visitor's movements were as light and swift as a shadow's. He put his hand on the knob. But there he paused.

CHAPTER V

REMISSION

He turned and looked back of him. He could see nothing of the old man but a crown of white hair above the shabby back of an antiquated easy chair.

The visitor drew something from the breast-pocket of his elegant but somewhat soiled coat. He thrust it back again.

He silently opened the door, as silently closed it again.

He looked around him.

Almost within reach of his hand there was a small marble-topped table of a design once fashionable. The only thing on this was a dusty little coverlet of white cotton.

With a movement so deft and lightning-quick that it would have served a sleight-of-hand performer in carrying through his most difficult illusion, the visitor had taken something once more from his breast-pocket and hidden it under the coverlet.

Even so, he was none too quick. The old man had turned, was peering over at him.

Had the old man seen anything the visitor didn't want him to see? It was hard to tell. Most likely he had not. Mr. Wood got up from his chair—bent, rugged, absorbed. He came over to the young man.

"Will I see you again?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"I'd like to see you again. I sort of feel as if you and I were neighbors."

"When 'r' you pullin' out?"

"I suppose it will be to-morrow. It hurts me, but I'll have to see Mr. Higginbotham. Did they tell you about it? He's——"

"Yeh! I got all that."

The visitor gave a quick glance, unobserved, at the marble-topped table.

"It hurts me, but I'll have to tell him what's happened."

"Was the money for him?"

"Yes."

"Ain't he one of those rich guys?"

"I believe his father left him quite a bit of money."

"Well, what did he need this for?"

"He may not have needed it, but it was his."

"You wouldn't have got no benefit from it?" And the visitor shifted his position somewhat away from the door.

The old man let one of his hard and twisted hands rest on the marble-topped table. His fingers toyed with the dusty coverlet.

"Only the benefit of a debt paid," he answered sweetly.

"And now I suppose you think that the gun who copped your leather owes you something."

"Do you?"

The youth who had given his name as Charley

Harris turned abruptly to the door. His sudden movement had disarranged the table-cover.

"I'm not thinkin'," he flung back savagely. "To hell with thinkin'. It costs too much."

He was putting something back into his pocket—into the inside pocket of his somewhat shabby but stylish coat. And, in spite of all his manifest embarrassment and indecision, his movements had remained as swift and baffling as those of a wild animal at bay. He would have been out of the door right then—and that the end of the episode—but the crazy old latch refused to function properly.

The delay was sufficient to permit the old man to react from his surprise.

"Charley!"

The word was an appeal. At the same time it was something of a command, full of quiet dignity, also with a friendly but perfect authority. It seemed to penetrate the back of the boy at the door and fasten him as surely as a harpoon would have done. The youth turned. He did this slowly. He slued around and stood there panting slightly, like one utterly exhausted.

"What?" he gasped.

The old man merely contemplated him.

"What do you want?" the youth repeated.

"To help you."

"I don't—know what you mean."

"You're young," said Ezra Wood, softly. "You're strugglin', boy. You're strugglin' 'twixt right and wrong."

"Where do you get that?"

"I can see it in your eyes. Boy and man, I've seen God's critters struggle like that. I've struggled like that myself—wrestled through the night. If ye look for it, the Almighty's 'most always there ready to lend a hand."

The words were gently, calmly spoken, yet with a certain thrill of exaltation in them.

The dark eyes of the youth glowed steadily as if they were unable to leave the other's face. The boy was breathing deeply. He slowly returned his right hand to the inside pocket of his coat. He let it rest on the contents of the pocket.

As one who watches for the manifestations of some terrible and tragic phenomenon, he drew from the pocket that thing he had recently hidden under the table-cover. The thing was an old wallet, shiny and brown.

There was a moment of silence. More than a moment. There, for almost a minute, silence was dripping about the two of them like something palpable—like rain.

"Mine!" breathed Ezra Wood, with an intake of his breath.

The visitor held it out to him—did this weakly, as if all his, so to speak, feline strength and speed had deserted him. His own face was going as white as the old man's face had been over there in the railway-station. His life was concentrated in his eyes. Without haste, without other apparent excitement than that shown by his visibly shaking hand, Ezra Wood received the thing he had lost.

"Count it!"

The old man slowly opened the wallet. There were eleven bank-notes in it, each for one hundred dollars.

"So you were from headquarters, after all," the old man said softly.

"Sure!"

There was nothing to indicate that the symbolism of this occurred to either of them.

"And you were tempted."

"What do you think! It was easy money."

"Even our Lord Jesus was tempted."

"I got to beat it. If I don't—say, what d'yuh mean—shakin' a wad like that in a fellah's face if yuh don't want him to nick yuh—handin' him a ticker 'at's good for another five hundred?"

"Are you in such need?"

"Sure!"

"Will you take what you need? Charley, I had a son, but he was born in the country, he had his parents —unworthy—but he had our love. I know now—I had forgotten—that the country is a protection—that it's sweet, and tender, and pure. There are some, I suppose, that can live without it. Our boy couldn't. If he'd stayed in the country we might have saved him. But here, not even our love, nor his early training, were enough. He wasn't strong, and if you're not strong——"

"Yuh got it right—'strong like a hairy gorilla'—"

"The city's not the place for you. Just think! Spring is here—the apple-orchards all drifted with white, and the birds—bluebirds and redbirds, robins

and finches—swelling their little breasts with song—and the meadows getting deeper and deeper with grass—and, by and by, the grass will be just filled with wild strawberries. All this under a sky that would make you understand why men call it heaven—blue and friendly—only a few fleecy clouds to serve as ships for your dreams.

"And after spring, the summer's there; with every day 'most a hundred years long, each year a happy lifetime—sunshine, and a smell of mint, of hay and apples, and the big woods there to give you coolness and shade, a spring to drink from, a brook making music, and at last a sunset proclaiming the glory of God, and the stars His long-suffering mercy.

"Son, were you ever in the country in the autumn?

"That's the time of the harvest—crops coming in, pumpkins in the corn, stock all fat and slick for the county fair, plenty for every one, folks laying in their supplies for the winter. And I've always loved the winters—burning hickory, parching corn, smoke-house perfuming the valley with a smell of new bacon. But, no—it wa'n't this that has always made me love the winter so. I loved it for the big, clean winds and the miles of untrodden snow, for the sparkly nights when every star might be the star of Bethlehem; and I loved it for the kitchen stove, where Martha and I have always sat on winter nights and sort of had our little children back.

"But it's spring in the country now. Can't you sort of hear it calling? I can:

" '*Come to me, all ye that are heavy laden!*' "

CHAPTER VI

NEAR CHATHAM SQUARE

In the meantime, New York's change of weather had culminated in a sleety rain, and the city had become, more than ever, a place of disconcerting contrast—of mortuary black and garish color; of dripping trees in haunted parks and juggernaut traffic in howling streets; of shivering poor in places that were damp and dark, and of blatant luxury in places that were warm and brilliant.

Moreover, it was Wednesday—with here and there, in somber neighborhoods, an oasis of yellow light where a church presented its mild invitation to prayer-meeting.

But, unless all signs failed, the devil also was keeping open house—dirty and discreet, sinister and cordial—there where the rear doors of saloons were open, and where the scarlet lobbies of obscure hotels insinuated secrecy and welcome, and Oriental restaurants, stealthy clubs, throbbing dance-halls, and noisy but secretive flats, all offered forgetfulness and mystery.

Night, for much of the world; but the day was just beginning for a certain saloon, especially in the back room thereof.

"Where's Chick?"

"Ain't seen him. What'll you have?"

"Hello, there, Solly!"

" 'Lo, Phil! Have a drink."

"Watchures?"

"Me? I'm takin' a little old-fashioned mixed."

"That's good enough for me."

"Two mixed ales, Eddie. Seen Chick?"

Outside and overhead, an Elevated train squealed through its thunder as it rounded the curve in Chatham Square.

"Came here to see him myself," said Phil, glancing about the back room of the Commodore. He was a well-favored youth, engaging, vicious. Both he and Solly were better dressed than the other male customers present. Phil shot the next question at Solly from the corner of his mouth: "Goin' to join the mob?"

"Whose—Chick's?"

Solly was a cherub, pink, two hundred pounds. The other gave him a glance of cynical amusement. Solly was so used to playing the part of dull innocence that he couldn't drop it even among friends. But a glint of hard wisdom flickered for an instant in Solly's baby-blue eyes. It was answer enough.

"Here's luck," said Phil, picking up one of the glasses that Eddie placed on their table.

"Drink hearty!"

Over the receding thunder of the Elevated train and the maudlin racket of the room, they could hear a thump of tambourines and then a crescendo chorus:

"At the cross, at the cross,
Where I fir-rest saw the light."

At the door to the dark hallway leading to the street appeared a slim young girl with brilliant eyes and other indications of consumption about her delicate and pretty face. She was dressed in black. Her brown hair was waved plainly down over her ears in that style once made famous by Cléo de Mérode. And her hat might have, almost, belonged to one of those singers out there in the army of salvation.

She advanced to the table where Solly and Phil were seated.

"My God!" she said. "What a night!"

"Hello, Belle!" said Solly. "Hello, Irene!" said Phil.

But there was no disagreement when they asked her to sit down, state her wishes in the matter of refreshment. The girl herself seemed to attach no importance at first to the fact that they had called her by different names. The barkeep came forward, swinging his shoulders like a boxer feinting for a lead.

"Hello, Eddie!" she greeted him.

"Hello, Blanche!"

"Say, you boys call me Myrtle after this, will you?" The girl reflected. "Rock-and-rye, Eddie!" And she added: "I want to change my luck. Where's Chick?"

"Maybe he's been pinched," Phil suggested with a grin.

"Him?" cried Myrtle. "The bull ain't been born that'll get anything on Chick."

"Many a good man's got his," mused Solly, paternal.

"I wonder where he is," said the girl.

"Out enjoyin' a stroll," said Phil, he being a humorist.

"He's planning some new riot," Solly averred.

Solly was right.

The youth of the dark eyes had torn himself away rather abruptly from the old gentleman in the Boone House. He had done this with the instinctive panic of a man who finds himself at grips with a power that he cannot comprehend. He had never read the story of Jacob and the Strange Man, and the wrestling-match that lasted till dawn, but he was feeling a good deal as Jacob must have felt.

Why should be have lost his nerve in this old man's presence?

No, it wasn't a matter of nerve. He had kept his nerve, all right, or he couldn't have followed the old man to the police-station, stuck around during all that followed.

Why hadn't he been able to make his getaway when there was nothing to stop him? Why did he come over here to the Boone House right at the time when a flick from headquarters was due to show up? Since he had shown up, how came it that he hadn't palmed the old geezer's watch?

That was the way his thoughts ran.

But back of these superficial riddles there remained

an instinctive, unshaken knowledge to the effect that some great change had occurred in his life, that he would never hereafter be the same. Again like Jacob —only this boy didn't know it—his thigh was out of joint, but he was blessed.

Beyond the door at which he still lingered, he could still see—with the eye of his mind—the old man he had just left, could see him in his shirt-sleeves and his stocking feet, an innocent, bewildered old hick, absolutely helpless, a child in need of a guardian.

"A poor old rube!"

That was what he was trying to tell himself.

But all the time that he was trying to tell himself this there was another voice that shamed him, that presented to him this man in there in the semblance of no man he had ever seen before—bigger than most men, white and shining, with power to do with other men as he willed.

The same voice was telling him that he would never see this white and shining giant in there again, but that this would make no difference.

He had been thrown, and thrown hard. There would be a limp in his make-up forever more.

But he had been blessed!

He never did quite know how he got out into the street again. He was so absorbed in wondering what had happened to him that it was only some time later that he noticed the sleety rain, the mortuary black and the garish color of the New York he had always known—remembered that he had a date with friends.

Far down-town, where Park Row and the Bowery meet—like a rowdy old beau and a beldame with a past—the young man of the dark eyes left the Elevated train that had brought him south. He was shaken. He was muttering to himself.

"Comin' down fer a card of hop," was the comment of a gateman who saw him pass.

But he felt as if he had been drugged already, if the truth were known. So much to think about! Yet thought almost impossible!

Still he was thinking, thinking, with such intensity that he passed them by and noticed them not—the slippered Chinamen, the coal-stained men of the sea, the befuddled women, the lurking gangsters. The sleet smote him. He merely lowered his head.

He entered the "family-entrance" of the Commodore. He also paused at that door where the girl in black had stood a while ago.

"And there's Chick now!" said Myrtle.

CHAPTER VII

THE BIG IDEA

CHICK came over to the table where his friends were seated, slid the vacant chair into position, dropped into it. Since that first glance from the other side of the room he hadn't looked at his friends. During most of the conversation that followed, his eyes were elsewhere. There was no special occasion for it, perhaps, but hardly at any time would his voice have carried beyond the table.

As for his friends, neither Solly nor Phil had given him more than a shifty glance. But Myrtle looked at him, frankly, openly, except when he happened to look at her. Neither did they speak loudly.

"Hello!" said Chick.

"How's the boy?" Solly wanted to know.

"Watcha been pullin'?" Phil demanded. "Been here an hour."

Eddie, the bartender, came up, rolling his shoulders. He had a smile for Chick, a scowl for a noisy customer at another table.

"Ask 'em what they want," said Chick. "Bring me a schooner-glass of milk with a couple of eggs in it." He slanted a look at Myrtle. "Coughin' again, ain't-

cha, kid? Bring a glass of milk for her, Eddie, but make it hot."

"Gotcha," said Eddie, and sidled away.

"'Smatter with the boy?" asked Solly.

"Needs some booze to cheer him up," Phil volunteered.

"Wait till he's had his breakfast," Myrtle recommended, without reference to the hour. "Can't you see that he hasn't had anything to eat? You'd be that way, too, if you'd just got up."

"You got me wrong," said Chick. "All of you."

"What's the answer?"

"Nothin's the matter with me. I don't need no booze. I didn't just get up. I've just been doin' a little thinkin', that's all. I got a big idea."

"If it's like that last big idea of yours when we worked the wine-agents' ball," said Solly, "come across."

"Nothin' doin' along that line."

"Another mill in Madison Square?" guessed Phil.

"Wait'll he's had his breakfast."

"I'm goin' to hand it straight to you three," said Chick. "You've treated me straight. You're about the only ones that ever did. You're the only pals I have."

He paused. An aged drunk was squabbling with himself in a corner. Strained through the windows of the place, between the intermittent rumble and roar of Elevated trains, there came the discordant, nasal whine of a Chinese flageolet.

"Honest, and on the level, how long do you think it is goin' to be before you all get yours?"

"Honest and on the level, how long do you think it's goin' to be before you all get yours?"

It was as if all sounds stopped. The effect of Chick's question was silence. The silence was absolute, so far as the four at the table were concerned. Solly took out a cigar, bit the end from it, spat out the end, struck a match, then looked at Chick through the bobbing flame as he lighted up. Phil gave Chick a lingering look from the corner of his eyes; his thin mouth went cruel. Myrtle stared wide-eyed, startled, a little frightened.

Solly was the first to recover himself.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Maybe I'll retire, or something; start a saloon; go over and live in England or France. I will, when I get the big stake."

"What's bitin' yuh?" asked Phil.

Chick stuck to his line of thought.

"Where's Silver Smith? Joliet! Roscoe Flynn, who stalled for him? Up the river! Where's Curly, and Clivvers, and Big Jones; Mary Mack, and Boston Sue? Ask the island or the morgue."

"My God, Chick, don't!" said Myrtle.

"You get it, kid," said Chick.

"They was thrown by their crooked pals," said Phil. "Either that, or the old stuff got 'em, or the snow."

"You ain't comparing yourself, Chick, with that bunch of rummies, are you? Not to mention ourselves."

"They were all as good as any, in their day."

"But not like you!"

"Not in one respect. They stayed too long."

"And they didn't have the chances you got," said Solly. "Why, boy——"

"You make me sick," Chick broke in. "Chances! Chances! What chances did I ever have? Brought up by a wood-merchant—learned how to swipe everything I could get my hands on before I was ten years old; taken on by Blodgett, the Dutch house man, and almost got beaten to death; and would have been if Muscowsky hadn't taken me to help him work the lofts; and after Muscowsky, the Hessian, for stores; and after the Hessian, young Billy Gin, for store-windows; and after Billy Gin, Old Doc, the cleverest dip of 'em all.

"Chances!

"I've had my luck—in not getting mine—when the bull dropped Blodgett from the roof, or when Muscowsky was shot. Where's the Hessian? Twenty stretches. Billy Gin? Makin' faces in a straight-jacket! Old Doc? Dead at thirty-three!

"I've never had no chances. Has any one worked harder than me? Has any one tried to play straighter with his pals? Haven't I left the booze alone?" He gave Myrtle a look that made her drop her eyes. "Haven't I been straight and fair in other ways? Have I ever broke trainin'—always been able to do my turn in the ring as a stall at havin' a profession? And what's the result of it all? I'm broke. This old town's broke me. You got to have a thinker on you like Thomas A. Edison or a good thing like Rockefeller—get me? Or tough like an elephant, or strong like

a monk, or slick like a snake, and then some—get me? Or this old town'll eat you alive!"

Solly dropped a slow wink at Phil, and Phil grinned cruelly.

"Eat your breakfast, Chick," Myrtle urged.

"Drink hearty!" said Solly, lifting his glass.

"Lookin' atcha," said Phil.

There was another comparative lull in the noises of the night. The aged bacchanal in the corner was mumbling now. As the youth of the dark eyes looked at him, perhaps there was a dissolving away of the coarser colors and the coarser lines until, under the same sort of white hair that he had seen once before, this night, there appeared a milder, kindlier face. He flashed his eyes at Solly.

Solly grinned. He hadn't liked Chick's talk, but he was getting his cherubic humor back.

"If it was any one but the boy," he said, "I'd back me guess that he'd got a green pill. It's the weather that's got to you, my boy. Let Eddie put a finger of rum in the slop."

"Leave him alone," said Myrtle.

"I've talked to you fair and on the level," said Chick. "There's the big auto meet down at the bay next week. I suppose you boys'll be there."

"With bells on," said Phil.

"And what's the big idea?" asked Sol.

"Oh, nothin' very much," said Chick, but his voice quivered. "I'm quitting. That's all! I'm blowin' the game!"

CHAPTER VIII

TESTIMENTAL

If there had been an effect of silence following Chick's words a little while before, his words now were in the nature of a sputtering fuse preliminary to an explosion. Nothing deadly. Something in the way of fireworks.

Solly let out a guffaw.

Phil stiffly turned his head for another sidelong glance, derisive, his thin mouth expanded in a snake-like grin.

Myrtle rested her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands, her wide eyes staring, the fine vapor of the drink in front of her slowly exhausting itself like some tenuous, disappearing hope.

That was all for a while. The Chinese musician played. There was the sound of a brief but vigorous encounter between two belligerent thugs in the street. Through the odorous air of the room there crept an added aroma of chop-suey and incense.

"I'm blowin' the game," Chick repeated in a whisper, and his fashion of saying it indicated that he said what he did for his own enlightenment as much as that of the others. Also there was an implication that he was surprised by the declaration as much as any one; yet, that he understood it perfectly, that it was the result

of all his hard thinking—groping; thought which at the time had seemed to be blind.

"Yuh talk about me having chances," he said with soft but passionate intensity. "No guy's ever had a chance unless he got started right. There's only one place where yuh can get started right—there's only one place where most of us can keep right—get me? And that's out in the country."

"He's wisin' up," said Phil, "to what I tells him about Saratoga and French Lick."

Chick did not reply. He hadn't even heard. To one who could have understood, his dark eyes would have told the tale—eyes that saw a vision. The sordid walls of the back room had disappeared—blue paint, dirty plaster, fly-blown lithographs of prize-fighters, burlesque queens, and once-famous horses; these had disappeared, and in their place was a melting prospect of apple-orchards white with bloom, then a sunset, then a wide sky, silent, fiery and nebulous with the billion stars. Perhaps, even, the mingled reek of beer and tobacco, chop-suey and incense, yielded to a cleaner breath. Most of the visions that men have are atavistic, have nothing to do with present experience.

"What do you know about the country?" Solly asked.

"Nothin'."

"What do yuh think it is—just a sort of zoo full of hicks waitin' to be trimmed?"

"I never been outside of New York City in my life," said Chick, absorbed. He faced them, a little sullen, ready to fight. "But I know I'm goin'. That's all.

We're the rubes and the hicks—if yuh come down to it—us guys that stick around here in the slums waitin' for the cell-block, or the island, or the morgue. Get me? I gives you the dope. This big town eats yuh alive."

"Chick's lost his noive," Phil grinned. "He's made a bad play. It's trun a scare into him."

"Guess again," Chick countered, with a subdued but deadly menace that was to put Philly out of the argument for a while. "I put one over to-day at the Grand Central 'at 'd made you swell out your chest for the rest of your natural. I'm out in the train-shed—see? —with a local comin' in. I pipes one of these rubes comin' down the steps. Bulls and specials all around —smoke-porters swarmin'—not a chance in a million to make the getaway. And I touches the rube—for—one —thousand—bones!"

"For the love of Mike!"

"My Gawd!"

"Me lost my nerve? Fergit it! I listens in when the hick makes his squeal—I tails him to the house—I gets my hunch—I hands him back his roll—I'm through!"

"Do you mean to say, my boy," Solly inquired, "that you nicked the jay for a thousand?"

"One thousand one hundred."

"And you make your getaway?"

"Clean."

"An' 'en you hand it to him back?"

"You heard me."

Solly looked at Phil. "You get your other guess, all right. Chick ain't lost his nerve nor nothin'. Say,

it'd take the nerve of a dentist to pull a thing like that—then tell it!"

"Yuh fat gonef——"

Myrtle interposed.

"Say, ain't Solly the limit? Neither him nor Phil's got a brain for anything higher'n a ham sandwich. I'll go to the country with you, Chick, if you want me to. The doctor says I ought to go."

Chick looked at the girl. She tried to brazen him out, but there was a shade of wistfulness about her. She wavered. She shrank.

"You're all right, Myrtle," he said to her, almost as if there was no one else there to hear. "Yuh got your faults, but yuh got a heart, and y' ain't dead from the neck up. And, so far's I know, you're still as straight as they make 'em. Keep that way, kid. Do you know what I'm goin' to do for you? I'm goin' to take you up to the Penn Depot and give yuh a shove 'at'll put yuh in Denver. Ain't that the place the doctor said?"

"Yes, but——"

"I'm goin' to stake yuh. That's all for you. If yuh ever think about me again, just sort of pull for me, kid, because I'll be needin' it, maybe, more'n you."

The little speech, and the simple, mortal directness of Chick's mood, impressed the other two men. Solly was moved to further speech, but he was subdued.

"The boy ain't sore at his old pal!"

For a moment, however, Chick ignored him. Chick was still addressing Myrtle, ostensibly, although Myrtle was apparently letting her interest waver. Myrtle, it

seemed, had got something in her eye and was having trouble to extract it.

"You're going to do what I tell yuh, kid. Go out West where the cowboys are. A year from now, and yuh can put it over on this here Daughter of the Gods. Get me? And some nice young feller's going to pick you out and find he's got a winner. Cut out the guys like me and Solly and Phil. You know—the wise ones!—so damn wise they can't see what's comin' to 'em even when they get the straight tip."

Solly was sober, but he was cynical.

"So it's the old reform!" he droned, tongueing his cigar and taking Chick in with narrowed eyes.

"What yuh got against it?"

"Nothing! Nothing!" Solly's voice registered weary patience. "Only, what's the use of your takin' to the bushes? Get a political job here in New York like a lot o' others."

"Yeh—and keep on bein' a crook—like them!" But Chick could see that his friend was sincere. "I want to get away from the crooks and the crooked stuff before it gets me," he explained with desperate persistence. "I want to get out where the apples grow, and the little birds are red and blue and know how to sing. Get me? And where the people are so honest that they don't have to lock their doors at night. Why, say! Here in New York a guy can't get into his own house without a bunch of pass-keys, and every other guy you meet in the street is a bull or a gun, or somethin'. How do yuh expect a feller to keep straight when he's up against nothin' but bull-con and flimflam, rough-

house and fakes, sniffs and smokes, creepers and—ah, what's the use! Yuh know what I mean!"

"If yuh mean," said Solly, "that your rubes are a bunch of plaster angels with wings on their backs, somebody's been handin' yuh the wrong line o' dope. I know. I was born in the country myself. And for all your dirty, low-down crooks, Chicky, gimme your hick crook—skinnin' each other out of peanuts; hookin' pennies from old women; sousin' on the sly; takin' dirty money with both mitts on week-days and wearin' white neckties on Sunday."

"That ain't the kind I'm goin' up against," said Chick in his slightly stifled voice.

"Where are you goin' to, then?" Solly inquired. "The moon?"

"No, I ain't goin' to the moon," Chick replied with a dogged grip on his vision or his hunch. "But I'm goin' back—get me? 'Way back!"

"And who is this," came a paternal voice, "who speaks of going back—'way back?"

CHAPTER IX

"SKY-BLUE"

"GRANDPA!" Solly almost sobbed.

To judge by Solly's accent, and the expression in Solly's cherubic face, the newcomer really was some cherished relative—ancient and beloved—one whose presence was a gift from Heaven almost too good to be true.

" 'Way back! 'Way back!" And he solemnly wagged his head.

He would have been a remarkable personage in any place of assembly, but most of all in the back room of the Commodore.

Phil was the next to recognize him. Into Phil's cynical but well-favored countenance there came a touch of amazement, also of respect flavored with awe.

"Sky-blue!" breathed Phil.

At the pronouncement of that fabulous name Chick turned.

His first impression was of a cascade of white whiskers, then of black broadcloth and a gold chain. It was only an instant later that he met the friendly twinkle of a pair of the brightest and keenest eyes his own eyes had ever met. They belonged to a man who couldn't have been much less than seventy. His

ministerial and hoary benevolence was rather emphasized by the fact that he wore a peculiar hat—shaped like a plug hat, but of stiff, black felt—and that his necktie, when it could be seen, which wasn't often on account of his whiskers, was a particularly flat, black Ascot. The tie was, however, ornamented with a jet-and-gold scarfpin big enough to serve a lady for a brooch.

"Sit down," begged Solly, getting to his feet.

But Eddie, the bar-boy, had his eye on the new arrival. In Eddie's face also there was a look of happy surprise. At the slightest gesture from the old gentleman, indicating that he was willing to join the party, Eddie had stepped forward swiftly with a chair, held this in place while the patriarch seated himself.

Eddie breathed his willingness to be of further use:

"What kin I bring yuh, bishop?"

The bishop reflected, with an alert appliance of thought.

"Bring me"—he paused, then pronounced the rest of it like a scientist stating a complex theorem—"a cocktail containing two parts Bacardi rum. Hold on, now! You tell him who it's for, and tell him that I don't want lemon but lime, and that he's to put the lime and the sugar in before the rum. Hold on!"

He reflected, benevolently. He thrust a finger and thumb into the pocket of his well-filled vest. He thoughtfully extracted a fifty-cent piece.

"Well, go on," he said. "I'll see how you get me

that order filled before—no, here! You give me forty cents. Quick!"

He didn't have to speak twice. He picked up the four wet dimes Eddie had left in exchange for the larger coin which Eddie had seized in his rush for the bar. Then the bishop looked around at his table companions. He smiled. He blandly winked.

"I bet," he said, complacently, "that's the first phony coin Eddie's took in for quite a spell. Solly, my child, I haven't seen you since you was a little shaver selling lemonade at the Muzée." He cast an indulgent glance toward Phil and Myrtle. But it was to Chick that he addressed himself with kindly interest: "Was you thinking of leaving New York?"

Chick was momentarily embarrassed, but Solly answered for him.

"You ought to 'a' been here, grandpa. The boy here's a little sour on the game—hands us a line of dope about how everybody gets it in the neck if they stick around too long. Say, it was in my mind to ask him how about you. Nobody ever got nothing on you; did they, grandpa? You ain't got any kick at how the world's been treatin' you; have you, grandpa?"

The bishop was placid, but before he could formulate his answer Phil contributed to the conversation.

"The old reform-bug's bit him."

Myrtle turned on him.

"You should worry," she flared.

"Yeh," Solly mocked, as the humor of the situation got the better of him; "says he ain't never had a chance because he wasn't raised up a rube. He ought to know

somethin' about rubes like you do; oughtn't he, grandpa?"

"Was you aiming to go out in the country, son?"

"Yes."

Chick answered softly, still embarrassed somewhat. It was all right for Solly to play the familiar with this old man, but there was something about him, as there is apt to be about any celebrity that one sees for the first time, to cause the mind to recoil for a better look. "Sky-Blue!" "The Bishop!" There were a dozen other war names that belonged to this patriarch. His fame extended from coast to coast. This, Chick knew, but only in a general way. Now, here was the great man himself—looking at him, taking a sympathetic interest in his plans.

Solly also diverted his interest to Chick.

"Say," he whispered from the side of his mouth, "they ain't a bull in the world that'd dream o' hangin' anything on grandpa!"

Before the interesting colloquy could develop further, Eddie came back with the bishop's beverage on a sloppy tray. In Eddie's face was a look of consternation carefully held in check. Eddie set the drink on the table and tentatively drew out the half-dollar the elder had given him. But Eddie's opportunity to put in a claim was deferred.

The bishop lifted the glass. He smelled it. He took a copious swallow. He appeared to masticate the liquid before it got down. He turned to Eddie with a glint of rage so subdued and deadly and cold that even Eddie winced.

"Git me the bottle!" the bishop commanded.

Eddie disappeared. He was almost instantly back, bringing the bottle with him. Sky-Blue took this and studied it patiently.

"It's Bacardi," he pronounced with mild surprise.

He pulled the cork. He decanted enough of the liquor into his glass to make up for the swallow he had taken. He turned to Eddie.

"Leave it here," he said. "I'll settle with you later."

Eddie withdrew, but only as far as the next table, which happened to be empty. There he paused long enough to bounce his coin a couple of times on the table-top.

The bishop refreshed himself with another swallow. He was mellow. He was suave. He slowly wagged his head. He watched, with a glint of kindly but detached interest, while Eddie, responsive to an inspiration, slipped the bad coin into the return change of a tipsy customer on the other side of the room. Then, once again he addressed the group:

"The country's good. I've always found it pleasant." He went reminiscent. "My first wife was a country girl—wooed her and won her out in Missouri."

"Was she——" Solly began. He hesitated, possibly for fear of committing an indelicacy.

But Sky-Blue, abstracted, nodded his head.

"Yes, that was her who later posed as the Princess Clementine or something up in Duluth."

"Whatever became of her?"

"I don't know," the bishop drawled.

"Ain't she——"

"No; she divorced me, or I divorced her—I don't remember which. The lawyers could tell you. *There's* a bunch of rascals for you. I never could get the straight of it. But, speaking about the country. I was addressing a grange out in North Dakota not more than two weeks ago. And—blooie, but it was cold!" He drained his glass and, absent-mindedly, filled it up again, this time with the Bacardi straight. "And I spoke of the blessings of the country. One of the most successful sermons I've got!"

"One of the what?" gasped Solly.

The bishop eyed him musingly.

"Solly, my child," he said, "you always was a materialist."

Myrtle dared speak. "I was tellin' him the same thing. I'm leaving for the country myself."

"A good idea," Sky-Blue averred, taking her in with his bright and kindly eyes. "Oh, the great country! It's so rich in sympathy! Just let a bank president out there, or somebody, know that you are a young widder, genteel, and in reduced circumstances, and not knowing which way to turn next! Oh, this great and generous land!" He turned once more to Chick. "But you go alone, my son," he said gently. "What line of reform was you aiming to manipulate?"

CHAPTER X

SNIFFING THE ASPHODEL

Possibly for the first time in his life, Chick was letting his embarrassment get the better of him. He was on strange ground. That was the trouble. But his courage came to his rescue. He dared tell the truth even to Sky-Blue.

"It ain't no line," he said. "I'm goin' straight. That's all. I got a hunch that I can do it, too, but only out in the country."

Neither Chick nor the bishop paid any attention to Solly's snort of laughter nor Phil's reptilian smile. Chick was looking at the bishop, and the bishop was looking at his glass. He meditatively filled this from the bottle again. He was about to raise the glass when he halted his movement with a look of consternation.

"Where are my manners?" he exclaimed, apologetically.

He summoned Eddie with a finger.

"Why don't you take the orders of this lady and these gentlemen?" he demanded reprovingly. "Bring them—bring them—let's see—a bottle of your best Catawba wine." He dismissed Eddie and momentarily gave his attention to Myrtle. "I'm going to ask them to make you a package of an extra bottle of that for

you to take away with you, and I want you to listen to what I say. You take your bottle of Catawba wine and open it and put in about a dozen tenpenny nails—wrought nails—don't let them give you cut nails—wrought nails!—and then cork your bottle and let it stand for about a fortnight—a month would be better. Got that? Catawba wine and then your wrought nails!"

"Yes," said Myrtle at a loss.

"Then, what's she to do with it, grandpa?" Solly inquired. "Poison the banker?"

The bishop ignored him.

"A dear old soul out in Juniata, Pennsylvania, gave me that prescription," he said. "She had a daughter that looked something like you, only she wasn't so good looking, and I asked her, says I: 'How comes it that Angelica,' says I, 'who used to be so slim and white now looks like one of those corn-fed girls,' says I, 'like they raise 'em where I come from,' I says, 'out Cincinnati way?' "

"Do you come from Cincinnati?" asked Myrtle.

"Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't," said the bishop. "It all depends. Well, as I was telling you, the dear old soul, she says, says she: 'I'm giving Angelica a tonic,' and she tells me about that. So you needn't be afraid of it doing you any harm, my child. I've given the prescription to five thousand people if I've given it to one; and all I ever got out of it was a case of whisky from a liquor-house; but it did them all good. Wine and iron! Nature's gift to suffering man!"

"You must do a lot of good," said Myrtle, to show her gratitude.

The bishop emptied his glass. He made an atrocious face, as the stuff went down, but he filled his glass again.

"Solly," he said, "it's nothing to me, but suppose you propose the smokes. You're looking fairly prosperous."

"Gotcha," said Solly, and he playfully displayed a small roll of bills. "Here, Eddie, take their orders for the smokes."

The bishop was in a reverie as he saw Solly's money.

"You was sayin'——" Solly suggested when Eddie had gone.

"Oh, yes," said the bishop. But any one could have seen that it was still several seconds before he fully recovered his line of thought. "As I was saying, that's the advice I'd give to any young man. Why stay around where all the sinners flee to, when you can go to a sweeter, purer clime, where the lambs ain't all grew horns and whiskers yet nor learned how to eat tin cans?"

"There's as many suckers here in New York, grandpa, as there are billy-goats," laughed Sol; "or nanny-goats either."

"Tell it to Sweeny," countered the bishop promptly.

He drained his glass, gathering philosophical force.

"You'll make a success of this reform business, my son," he said, smiling at Chick. "You believe in goodness. That's the secret of success." He laughed in his beard. "Oh, this sweet, sweet appeal to benign flap-

doodle and mellifluous balderdash! But you must be sincere. You must believe it yourself. Be good and you'll be happy. Oh, how I suffered before I learned the truth. Let us spread the truth to others not so fortunate as us. Let us carry the sweetness of this broad land to the besotted unfortunates of the wicked Babylon, to the end that they also, brothers and sisters, may be blessed like us and sniff the asphodel!"

"He's gettin' a little stewed," breathed Solly.

To Chick it seemed that there was a gleam of alert intelligence in Sky-Blue's eye, notwithstanding the ground for Solly's judgment. And the bishop himself followed with the wise suggestion that they all be going their several ways. Myrtle had her package of wine. There was nothing more especially pressing either to do or to talk about.

"Solly, my child," said the bishop, with a trembling note in his voice that hadn't been there before, "I'm getting too old to trust myself, but I can trust you. Eddie, here, is waiting to get back at me on account of that little joke I played on him. We'll fool him again. You settle and let me know how much it is. You wouldn't lie to me about it. Would you, Solly?"

"What do you think?"

They went out on to the sidewalk, leaving Solly to follow.

The rain had stopped, but the night had continued to be damp and unseasonably cool. Crowded up into a dismal but more or less sheltered corner of the barroom entrance they saw a little slum girl with an

armful of untidy flowers which she had evidently been trying to sell. It was the bishop who saw her first.

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed. "What have we here?"

The little girl looked up at him. She had a smile in her hollow eyes. She tried to repeat the formula of her salesmanship. Her lips moved, but her voice was inaudible.

The bishop thrust his fingers into various pockets. He turned to Phil.

"She says her flowers are worth two dollars," he announced, with cheerful sympathy, all trace of weakness now having disappeared. "Slip the little lady two dollars—until I settle with Sol."

Phil was obedient to the higher law.

"There's your two dollars," said the bishop playfully to the child. "Now you're free to go home. Where'd you say it was?" He bowed his patriarchal head until his ear was on a level with the little girl's lips. "Ah, Cherry Street! I shall have the honor of sending you there in a cab."

And Chick remembered vaguely some tradition as to why this old man had been called Sky-Blue. It was because he was always doing things like this.

He saw the bishop summon the night-hawk cabby, put the little maid into the vehicle—no, he wouldn't take her flowers; they had been rained on enough to freshen them up, and the weather was cool, so that she could sell them all to-morrow—and saw him give the cabman a bill with a request that the cabman keep the change.

The bishop was in a softer mood than ever when

he returned from the little adventure. He was smiling, but his eye was a little moist. He ignored Phil with a slight hint of asperity. He seemed to be drawn to Chick.

"See how little it costs to be kind—to spread a little sweetness on our pathway through the world, as the poet says."

"It looks to me like it sets *you* back quite a bit," said Chick.

Sky-Blue dropped his voice to a confidential tone.

"I'm going to let Phil keep that two dollars to his credit," he said; "and the child will get home in safety—in safety and happiness—poor little sparrow, even if that was a punk dollar bill I handed over to the jehu."

Solly came out and joined his friends.

"It was eight fifty, grandpa," he announced.

"What was?" the bishop inquired with polite interest.

"The drinks; and I had to let out a roar to keep it that low."

"Well, you were always good at that, Solly, when it came to paying for anything. But I don't quite understand. I'm getting a little old. What's it all about? You'll have to make yourself clear."

"You owes me eight fifty," said Solly. "Is that clear?"

"Solly, my child," said Sky-Blue, with sincere regret, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you've been a little fresh all evening, calling me 'grandpa' and everything. Now, let us have an end of this nonsense."

He turned to Chick.

"And that's the way of the world," he said, linking his arm into that of the younger man. "There is a scheme in things. Come on, Solly, and you, Phil. I'm taking you all to supper. Don't be afraid. I have a friend who will pay for it, and maybe show you how to get a little stake. I knew you'd smile at that. Good money! Bad money! We all get our share of each, and what we get we pass along. You're right. Go where the good money is—'way back!"

" 'Way back! 'Way back!"

For a long time after he was alone that night, Chick's mind was in confusion, a jumble of the words and the phrases he had heard this day—from the lieutenant of police, from the old man who had been his victim and his master, from his friends, from Sky-Blue; a jumble of fragmentary pictures also—of the back room of the Commodore, of a hill white with bloom, of Solly's fat face, mocking but not unkind; Phil's face, friendly but cruel; Myrtle's face, oddly transfigured, as he had seen her last at the Pennsylvania Station when he bade her good-by; the face of Ezra Wood; the bishop's!

But through all this double confusion, like the sound of a bell through the noises of a street came the echo:

" *'Way back! 'Way back!*"

He didn't know where he was going. It didn't matter very much. The whole of America lay to the north and west and south of him. He had given Myrtle about all the money that he had, and he had a vague idea

that this was going to bring him luck. The pawnshops would open at 7 A.M.—an hour fixed by the police. Then he would pawn all he had. It wouldn't yield him much, but it would be sufficient to carry him far from New York, far from the only life he had ever known, far from all the people he had ever known.

There, for a time, he regretted it a little that he hadn't talked this thing over with old Ezra Wood. Or, suppose that he himself went to Rosebloom.

No, everything that had thus far entered into his life he would put behind him. New York had mauled him, shaken him down, begun to eat him alive. He could see it now.

He would begin all over again—like an innocent babe among other innocents—*'way back!*

CHAPTER XI

SPRING

THE whole country was busy about something. It was an activity which paralleled and confirmed an activity within himself. The idea kept coming back to him wherever he went, and the further he went the stronger the idea grew.

He went to the westward, slowly, by easy stages, without any particular design. The big towns made no appeal to him whatsoever. It was the open country and the villages that ensnared his interest, set up a vibration in his own heart that was in perfect accord with the vast but muted tremolo of the cosmic orchestra. The opening note of a new composition—a new symphonic poem.

Not all of a man's feelings are reduced to speech. And for much of the time Chick's moods were wordless. But all this was what he felt.

There was an underlying strain of philosophy and poetry in his nature which he had always known existed there. The wizard touch of old Ezra Wood had identified it for him. That was all. What Chick saw with his eyes translated itself largely in the words that the old man had used in speaking of the country. There

was that wider sense, however, that had nothing to do with merely physical sensation.

"God's own country!"

The familiar phrase of a sometimes cheap and tawdry patriotism took on a wider meaning and expressed somewhat this feeling of harmony. And he drew on other sources of expression—songs and sentiments that had been planted in his heart 'way back in school-days. He was not without education. No child of the New York streets is.

> My native country, thee,
> Land of the noble free.

It was as if the seeds of a new growth had been planted there—in some seer October, or in the dark of some winter now past—and that these were now springing up, covering everything with green, delivering a promise of blossom and future harvest.

Chance, as much as anything, carried him a little to the south as well as west—right toward the heart of the country; or, if not its heart, at least its lungs—a corpuscle going back in the veins of the body politic to be revivified, although he didn't think of it that way. Only that feeling that he was a part of some great scheme persisted and made itself clear.

His course led him down through the Delaware Water Gap, which is a region of wooded hills, carpeted valleys, glimmering rivers and misty cascades. He had told the truth when he said that he had never been out of New York. Even New York he had never seen as some people see it. New York was that screaming

monster where it was mostly night, where the sky was frontiered by high roofs and smoke-stacks, or shut out altogether by the "L."

There were times when Chick was telling himself that he had never seen the sky before—not since some dimly remembered past. You can't see the sky when your business keeps your eyes on the things of the street. Nor had he ever seen the earth before. The sidewalks, the granite pavements, the asphalt, the slippery mosaics and soiled carpets that his feet had hitherto trod—these were not the earth.

He had been gone from New York for almost a month. This particular night he had slept in the open. He hadn't slept very much, but this was not due to any lack of comfort. Discomfort could never keep him awake. He had slept in all sorts of places, and this place was better than any of them—under the low boughs of a purple beech, where the grass none the less grew fine and long, springy and thick, on the rim of a wide valley that stretched away into hazy nothingness, as if this were the end of the world.

He had found this place at sunset, when he was traveling on foot, decided, this time, to test the new world of his discovery to the utmost. He had passed many a night in New York City "out in the open"—"flying the banner," as they called it, back there; and what would it be like to "fly the banner" here in the country? Now he had tried it, and he felt, as he had never felt before, that he finally belonged to the open places. He had been initiated. No longer was the

country holding out on him. He knew the days. He knew the nights.

At sunset, though, the whole valley had been so flooded with red and golden light, especially straight ahead of him, that many of the details of it had escaped him. After that, it was the purpling twilight, getting so thick that it floated the eyes of his head and the eyes of his mind right up to where the stars were coming out.

It was not until the dawn that he saw that there was a town in the valley. It looked almost like his mental picture of Rosebloom, the place old Ezra Wood came from. He would have to see this town.

He took his time about his toilet.

It may have been the result of his night in the open air, but there was a picnic-feeling in his heart—a feeling that engulfed him and permeated all things that this was a holiday. There was a hint of happy adventure about it, as well. The birds were singing about him as he washed himself in the rock wash-bowl of a tiny brook. The birds were celebrating something which was about to come to pass. He changed his linen. He scrupulously brushed his clothes. He polished his shoes with strands of grass.

"Be you a stranger in these parts?"

He turned and saw an old, old man at the top of a tussocky slope. And, for all any one could have judged from the appearance of him, the old man had been there all the time, just like an old stump, or one of those shy, wild creatures which know how to emerge

from a hiding-place and then rest silent and motionless for hours.

"I sure be," the New Yorker replied. "And where do you come from?"

"Well now," said the ancient, "since you've asked me, I ain't a goin' to tell you no lie. I just come from the medder back there that Uncle Newt Parker stoled from Henry Smith in 1882. Hold on, now. I don't want to tell no lie. It wa'n't in 1882, neither. It was in 1883. Yes, sir. It were in the fall of the year, 1883."

All the time that the ancient was saying this, he kept his eyes gimleting the distance, as an aid to abstruse thought.

"Live there?"

The native swung his small eyes on Chick with a start.

"Where—the medder?"

"Yeh."

The ancient once more let his sight go into the far places.

"Now, if you'd asked me in the first place where I lived and not where I come from, I'd 'a' told you right out. A fair answer fer a fair question. That's my motto. That's what I was tellin' one of these here Indian doctors who went through here last fall and wanted to know if I ever suffered from chilblains. A fair answer fer a fair question. Stranger, do you see that town over there?"

"Yes. Is that where you live?"

"Hold your horses. Hold your horses. I ain't goin' to lie to you. I lived there once."

"What's the name of it?"

"Well, if they ain't changed it since I been there, the name of that town over there, since you been asking me, stranger, is St. Clair."

CHAPTER XII

"FLOWERY HARBOR"

RIGHT where St. Clair and the open country merged, there was a large old frame house in a large old garden. Both showed signs of decay. There were gaps in the white paling fence. The fruit and decorative trees had all grown into black and scrawny old age. There was a dry fountain—also white originally—wherein a badly scarred infant throttled a swan. As for the house, it could have known neither paint nor carpentry for twenty years at least.

Yet the whole place still radiated a certain mellow dignity, even a certain homely beauty—honeysuckle running over the fence; a hundred varieties of flowering weeds and bushes drifting perfume and color elsewhere; wrens, robins, and martins contributing their note of cheerfulness and life.

And that well-known truth that any man's home is in the nature of a portrait of himself was amply exemplified in the present instance, when Colonel Evan Williams appeared through the front door of the mansion.

He always called it a mansion.

For the colonel—call him that; every one else did—likewise suggested a sort of decorative decay. And he was garbed in raiment singularly suggestive, to any

one with a grain of imagination, of the same state of affairs. He and his clothes were equally well suited to each other. There was nothing sordid about them—nothing that wasn't dignified, yet homelike and friendly.

The colonel had a red face and a white mustache—one of those antebellum mustaches, very heavy, that descend far below the chin. He had a droopy blue eye that was at once belligerent and jovial. His whole face was jovial, albeit dignified—especially his nose, which was inclined to be pendulous and was certainly more highly colored than the rest of his countenance. He must have been a man of splendid presence in his day. In fact, there was still ample evidence of this, but now he was inclined to sag a little, was a trifle heavy on his feet—just like this old house of his.

He stood there at the top of the broad stoop like an honored heirloom from another generation. He wore a black slouch hat. He carried a gnarled, black cane.

He appeared to be waiting for something, or to have fallen into a reverie—you couldn't have told which, from his drooping, thoughtful immobility. Then, with a surprising hint of alertness, he cocked his head and listened.

From somewhere in the back of the house there sounded forth a girl's clear, strong soprano:

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on!"

"Dear child! Sweet child!" the colonel murmured. "If I could only spare you this!"

But there was an unmistakable craftiness about his movements, and of judgment matured through bitter reflection, in what followed. He was sentimental, but no sentimentality could master him.

From the tail pocket of his frayed Prince Albert he brought a rectangle of pasteboard. He had thought of everything. It wasn't for nothing that he had been reckoned one of the leading young lawyers of the South. There was even a loop of string through a hole in the pasteboard convenient for its suspension on the old bell-pull. He hung the card in place.

He did this to the rousing chorus:

"Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!"

Still standing there, he drew a handkerchief, also from a tail pocket—there were two of these pockets and each appeared to be big enough to bin a sack of meal. He wiped his eyes. He blew his nose. He returned the handkerchief to its place and brought out, in turn, something that might have been a flask.

"Medicine, sir!—by my physician's order!—the only prescription you could induce a physician himself to take!"

He kept his back turned while he tilted his head. He cleared his throat. He returned the thing that might have been a flask to the storage place at the

rear. He straightened up. He turned and marched with becoming dignity down the decrepit steps.

And all who would might read that here in the mansion there was a

ROOM TO LET.

It was the right and beautiful thing. You could tell it by the colonel's walk. Dignified, thoughtful, his coat-tails swinging rhythmically, he passed on down the garden walk to the unhinged front gate. He passed on up the street.

It wasn't much of a street—just a sort of country lane, formalized to some extent by other fences farther on and occasional bits of sidewalk. But such houses as there may have been were mostly hidden by trees and shrubbery.

A bluebird sang. There was a flash of red where a cardinal passed. The whole country roundabout, and, for that matter, the town itself except for two or three church steeples, was smothered in bloom of sorts—drifts of white and pink, where the apples or the dogwoods, the peaches or the Judas-trees, were calling to the bees. The bees and the birds—and that as yet invisible girl—furnished about all the sound there was —a world, therefore, set to music.

In spite of all this predicated solitude, the colonel's sortie and his subsequent movements had, none the less, been duly noticed—duly and severely noticed.

From the hedge of Osage orange, on the other side of the street, a pair of eyes had studied him with all

the alert intelligence of a squirrel's. And these were the eyes of Mrs. Meckley, who lived over there—in a little cottage as carefully concealed and, you might say, as arboreal, as any squirrel's house. A professional widow, Mrs. Meckley—perpetually lonely, according to what she herself always said, yet given to close observation, and numerous calls.

"Room to let!" she cried to herself when she made out the colonel's sign. "The old reprobate! The old miser!"

She would have departed then to spread the tidings, only, with a twinge of exquisite excitement, she saw that her news budget was in a fair way of becoming duly amplified.

"He's goin' in!"

This second comment was inspired by the sight of a stranger—an event in itself sufficient to enrich any day. The stranger had come into the street from the direction of the open country. And yet there was a certain citified air about him—as there usually was about strangers, after they had been measured and weighed by local standards.

The stranger carried a dress-suit case. His clothes were rather badly worn and in need of pressing; still there was an impression of nattiness about them—from his velours hat, with the brim turned down on one side, right on to his light-tan, cloth-topped shoes.

Mrs. Meckley saw him pause at the sagging gate, saw him look after the retreating form of the colonel as if half persuaded to run after him, then drop his

glance at a faded little plank at the side of the gate which proclaimed that this was

FLOWERY HARBOR.

"By crickety," whispered Mrs. Meckley, becoming profane in her excitement; "he's goin' in!"

She wasn't mistaken.

Moreover, there was an odd suggestion of romance not only in the stranger's youth and the fashion in which he was dressed, but also in the way he appeared to be impressed by all he heard and saw.

Just a vague impression that came to Mrs. Meckley, something which hadn't escaped her bright and squirrel-like eyes—her whole face and even her body were squirrel-like—and yet something that she didn't wholly comprehend.

CHAPTER XIII

AS SEEN AND OVERHEARD

ALVAH MORLEY, singing as she scrubbed the kitchen, heard the door-bell ring—which wasn't surprising, in view of the fact that the bell was mounted on a spiral spring against the kitchen wall and was designed to be heard throughout the house. She stopped short in the middle of a "hallelujah." She sat back on her heels and looked at the bell with the most perfect astonishment, as at a phenomenon that had never occurred before.

But her astonishment held her for only a second or two.

While the bell was still jangling she scrambled to her feet, and untied the apron that enveloped her.

She was nineteen or so, slim, plain rather than pretty, with straw-colored hair and not very rich in color otherwise—still with a measure of that beauty which always goes with youth and flushed excitement.

She looked down at her skimpy, blue calico dress. It was clean at any rate. Her black shoes and stockings were passable. They were, for this time of day when folks were supposed to be working, anyway. But who could be ringing the door-bell at this hour?

She ran over to a corner of the kitchen where there

were a towel and a small looking-glass and other toilet accessories. She jerked some water into an enameled basin from a half-filled bucket. She rinsed her hands and smoothed her hair, all with a nervous energy so speedy that she had completed the operation by the time that the old bell was just quivering back into silence.

Around in front, the stranger who had rung the bell stood there at the top of the rickety stoop and patiently waited. He knew that there was some one home. There had been the song of the girl. He knew that his ring had been heard. He had heard it himself—and the song had stopped. And he didn't even wonder what the girl looked like. Nor did he greatly care.

So there was a room to let in Flowery Harbor! Some name! And that old gent with nerve enough to take a swig on his front door-step and still swing his coat-tails like that would most likely be the landlord. Say, this old man was human!

He stood there like that with the smell of honeysuckle in his nose and the echo of the girl's voice still in his ears and a propitious impression of the colonel on the surface of his brain.

He felt the first subtle creep of a hunch he had been waiting for.

"I—I—beg your pardon!"

He turned.

Some instinct of caution—or some other instinct less easily defined—had sent Alvah to scurrying around the side of the house through the garden instead of through

the gloomy interior of the house itself. She stood there now at the corner of the building—there where the mossy brick path passed under a tunnel more or less well defined of clematis, syringa and lilac.

"How do you do?" said the stranger.

He had set his suit-case down. He jerked his right hand to his hat, but he left the hat in place. This was no lady standing over there. This was nothing but a kid.

"How do you do?" said the kid, plainly at a loss.

"Is your mother in?"

"No, sir."

"I came to see about the room. Maybe you can tell me about it."

"What room?"

"Say, do you live here?"

"My home is in Bangor, Maine."

"Well, do you work here, then? I want to find out about this here room."

"There's nobody home."

"You said it! No, honestly! Ain't nobody here?"

All this was just nuts and candy for old Mrs. Meckley across the way. She could get most of the conversation by straining a lot, and she was straining.

"The girl's a flirt," she passed judgment. "She ought to be switched."

"Only me," Alvah was saying.

Despite the sagacious deduction of Mrs. Meckley from what had already transpired, Alvah had an appearance of timidity—of timidity touched with doubt and not a little fear, as if she were not quite certain

but that she was in the presence of some one slightly deranged. She was reassured to some extent, however, by the stranger's next move.

He calmly seated himself on the none-too-solid railing of the stoop.

"Good night!" he exclaimed, in spite of the manifest morning. "When are you expecting the old gent back?"

"He was going to the post-office. He won't be long."

"Birdie's there with the goods this time, anyway. All right, Birdie. I'll wait."

Greek to Alvah; but nothing unpleasant about it. Now that the stranger wasn't looking at her, she could look at him. She discovered that he wasn't hard to look at. His face rather fascinated her. He certainly had wonderful eyes. His voice and his language were unmistakably American, but he looked like a foreigner.

She dared advance a step.

As she did so, she saw that there was something suspended on the bell-pull. She advanced some more.

The next time that the stranger looked at her he saw that she was standing as if hypnotized, staring at the announcement that here there was a room to let. There was a touch of drama in her appearance that did not escape him—the unaffected pose of her slight frame, her hands folded against her meager breast; and he noticed, without exactly appraising them, the fine line of her cheek and chin, the whiteness and nobility of her forehead. All this, nevertheless, with a touch of con-

descension on his part—as an older and wiser person annoyed by the persistent ignorance of a dull child.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"That sign—it isn't so—some one put it there for a joke."

"I guess you got another think," he said, without discourtesy. "I see the old gent hangin' it up himself not ten minutes ago."

"My uncle?"

"Gee, it takes a long time to get it across. Sure! The old gent that just came out of here. What's the matter?"

The girl had continued to stare at the sign, with scarcely another glance for the visitor. But now she looked at him, squarely, the while a warmer coloring came into her face and a shadowy brightness into her hitherto rather cool, gray eyes.

"You are certain you saw my uncle put that sign there?"

"Sure! That's what I'm tellin' you—takes it out of his pocket and hangs it up just before he beats it up the street. I ain't stringin' you."

"But, oh, he didn't mean it."

She was no longer afraid of the stranger. She ran lightly up the stoop. She took the sign from the place where it hung, hid the letters of it against her breast.

"What's the idea?" the young man inquired, softly, with a direct invitation to confidence. "What's wrong? Ain't he got a right to rent a room if he wants to? Is the place so overcrowded? Has everybody got too much coin? Or don't he own the house? Or what?"

The questions merely bewildered the girl. At the same time it was evident that most of them went home.

"You don't understand," she answered, appealingly.

"You said it."

"My uncle's not always himself."

The confession hurt her; still, some sort of explanation was in order.

"You mean he's sort of hittin' up the booze?"

Her troubled eyes were her only answer. It was affirmation enough.

"You don't want to let that worry you, Mabel——"

"My name is Alvah—Alvah Morley."

"Glad to meet you, Alvah. That's what I'm tellin' you. The old gent looked all to the good to me."

"He's the finest man in the world," the girl flamed from the midst of her trouble. "Only, there are times like the present when he does things that he wouldn't do—if—only——"

"Look——" the stranger began.

But there came a diversion. The girl, with an exclamation of mingled relief and consternation, ran down the steps. She was out of the gate. She had seen her uncle coming back from the post-office.

All this was as good as a play to Mrs. Meckley, over there behind her screen of Osage orange.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. RICHARD DAVIES

THE youth on the stoop had had a moment of hesitation. He came down the steps, however, and met the girl and the old gentleman half-way to the gate.

"Ah!" the old gentleman exclaimed.

"I see the sign. I come in. I ring the bell——"

"I told him——" the girl began.

"Sir, I have the honor"; and the old gentleman, removing his hat and thrusting his stick under his arm, offered his hand.

There was a suggestion in the move that "got to" the stranger, as he himself would have said—got to him in a pleasant sort of way. The stranger had also pulled his hat, had taken the proffered hand, had done this with a quick but not ungraceful bow.

"Permit me to introduce myself," said the elder, "although that may not be necessary. I am rather widely known. Perhaps you have heard of the Williamses. We've had a fairly active part in the history of our country."

"Sure! Everybody's heard about the—Williamses."

"I am Evan Williams."

"Glad to meet you, colonel."

"Ah! I see that you are familiar with my honorary title."

"Sure!" replied the young man, who didn't understand.

"And may I be so bold as to ask you to refresh my memory? It seems to me that we have met."

"I don't believe so, colonel."

"Your name is?"

There was a perceptible pause.

"My name?"

They were still locking hands in the original grasp. Their eyes had met.

"Davies," the young man answered.

"A splendid name! One that makes you doubly welcome, sir. I dare say the Williamses and the Davies were fighting side by side long centuries ago."

"I'll take your word for it."

"And your Christian name, if I may ask?"

"Richard!"

"Richard Davies! Why, sir! Is it possible? You are doubtless a descendant of that celebrated Bishop Richard Davies—do you recall?—whom Queen Elizabeth called her 'second St. David.'"

"You may be right, at that."

"For you are Cymric. Pardon the personality, but I could tell it by your appearance even if it were not for your fine old Cambrian name."

"Do I get the room?"

"I shall be delighted. Let us inspect the premises, Mr. Davies."

"Uncle!"

Colonel Williams turned to his niece with mellow good humor.

"What will the neighbors say?" she demanded, confused.

"Say! A most stirring event! A Davies become a guest in the house of a Williams! A Celtic reunion! Didn't I tell you all the time that it would be well with us if we accepted a lodger or two? Come in, sir! We'll seal our acquaintance as gentlemen should!" He made a pawing movement with his hand to assure himself that his flask was in the old familiar place. "'Tis none too early in the morn to touch the lyre!"

There was space enough in the Williams mansion for many guests.

Beyond the front door there was a broad hall, high and long, up two sides of which ran a flight of steps to the second floor. Four large rooms opened off the hall.

"On the left, the drawing-room," said the colonel, while Alvah Morley looked on, wide-eyed, shrinking, yet with a touch of rebellion in her attitude. "On the right, the library. Back of the drawing-room, our parlor or living-room, and opposite that, the dining-room. I regret the absence of servants, and my inability to keep the place up."

"It looks good to me," breathed Mr. Richard Davies.

"As soon as I can get the estate settled—the estate of my brother, Abner, sir, to which I have devoted, not unwillingly, the best years of my life, I shall proceed to the refurnishing of the house."

"It looks good to me," the one-time Chick repeated.

He was glad now that he had given his one and only true name to the old gentleman. The hall reared its gloomy grandeur about him. There were no carpets

on the floor. The paper on the wall was stained by time and leakage, for it was evident that the roof of the mansion was no longer at its best. But there was a solemnity about this acceptance of him in a home like this that at once weighed upon him and lifted him up. The place not only looked good to him; it looked almost too good.

"There's only one thing, colonel," he broke out softly, as soon as the girl had disappeared into the cavernous shadows at the rear of the hall; "you haven't said anything about the price."

"Of what, sir?"

"The room."

"My dear sir, you are my guest as long as you care to remain. I am honored."

"Oh, say!"

"Not a word, sir!"

The colonel also had noticed the retirement of his niece. He cast a further glance to assure himself that they were alone. He brought his flask from its hiding-place. He uncorked it, elaborately wiped its gullet with his hand.

"As our ancestors did under Rhodri Mawr!" he invited.

"Not for mine! I'm on the wagon."

"You mean?"

"Thanks! I'm leavin' it alone."

"Sir, I honor you. But, thirty years ago, my physician—it was——"

"Look out," the younger man whispered. "There's the young lady!"

The colonel cleared his throat and put the bottle away.

It was to a bedroom on the second floor that Mr. Richard Davies eventually carried his suit-case—a room that was larger than the back room of the Commodore, near Chatham Square; and there were windows in it that gave both on the old garden and on the far country beyond.

"It looks good to me," said the lodger.

Looked good to him? It all looked so good that it almost hurt. This was the thing he had come out to find. Lonely? Sure! Ever since he had left New York. But he wasn't going to weaken. Not yet! Maybe, after a while he'd duck. Maybe! Why not con himself along? Maybe, after a while, he'd just naturally get sick of trying to make a living by selling soap, or other things, and nick some rube for his roll—for keeps, this time!

And then, right then, from the combination of all the things that were coming to him through the open window—sky and earth, air and bird-song—came something that recalled old Ezra Wood, not as a rube, but as a white and shining giant who had exerted a strange influence over him.

It was almost as if he could hear that good old man speak again:

"The Lord have pity on us all!"

"Every day 'most a hundred years long, each year a happy lifetime."

"If he'd stayed in the country we might have saved him."

"Ah, hell!" he said. "This is fierce! I wonder what Phil and Solly are pullin' to-day? And old Sky-Blue? And Myrtle?"

'Way back?

Say! This was it. 'Way back a million miles!

And he had become *Mr. Richard Davies.* He was glad that he had laid that name aside and kept it clean —laid it aside so many years ago that he could hardly remember when; but he did remember, indistinctly, the dark-eyed woman who had been his mother, and, more indistinctly yet, mistily, the gray specter who had been his father; the specter of a distinguished man who had been Mr. Richard Davies also. Then the night of flame and smoke wherein his parents disappeared. They must have been living in a poor neighborhood. Old Denny, the wood-merchant, had become his foster-parent, and that was when he was eight years old.

"Mr. Davies!"

The girl was calling him.

He stepped over to the door so swiftly, and opened it so deftly, that it frightened her.

"My uncle wants to know," she recited, "if you will do us the honor of taking tea with us."

"Sure! Much obliged."

"It'll be at about dark," she said. "Uncle likes to eat his supper by candle-light."

"Tell him I'll be there, and much obliged."

He stood there at his door and watched her go away, a pale shape disappearing in the shadows toward the back of the upper hall. Now that he thought of it, he somehow or other felt sorry for this kid.

CHAPTER XV

UP THE STREET

But, also, he felt sorry for himself. He couldn't help it. There was something about this very room that recalled that vaguely remembered home of his childhood when his parents were still alive—bare walls with broken plaster, no carpet on the floor, a somewhat caved-in bed in the corner of the room. There was even something reminiscent in the flowers, the greenery, and the bird-song.

He guessed the truth.

There was a geranium on the window-sill of that earlier home. A neighbor had a canary in a cage.

He pulled off his shoes. He partly undressed himself. He cast a longing gaze at the bed. It seemed to him that he hadn't slept since leaving the old town back there, and he always did prefer sleeping in the daytime. A dreaminess drew him. He wasn't hungry. He had eaten a hearty meal not much more than an hour ago, at a farmer's house, a mile or so back along the road, and the farmer had refused to take a cent for his hospitality. None the less, memory of this meal brought up a hundred souvenirs of savory Chinese and Italian dishes in the city he had left. Wouldn't it be

great, after all, to wake up and find a dish of chow-mein at his side?

He crawled onto the bed and let himself go.

He slept the afternoon away. And, instantly, when he awoke, there flashed into his thought a clear and concise record of the girl of this house, and of the colonel, her uncle, and of the house itself. The record brought with it a little mental groan. What was he that he should thus let them think that he was their equal? That he should take a room in this house of theirs? Set himself up as the son, or the grandson, or something, of a bishop?

The only answer to these questions was a pang of homesickness so poignant that he could have wept.

Then he listened to the silence, and the silence weighed upon him as the earth might weigh upon the chest of a man buried alive. There for a minute or so the silence was absolute. Not even a bird twittered. Not a wheel turned. No one spoke.

"I got to get back," he whispered. "I'll stick it out a day or so longer. But I got to get back!"

He crept over to the window in his bare feet and looked down into the garden. He saw Alvah Morley down there. She was picking flowers. He saw that she had changed her dress. He wondered why. And he noticed that she wasn't such a kid as he had believed her to be. More like a school-teacher she was—a white cotton dress, fresh and crinkly from the wash, her straw-colored hair drawn back in a smooth knot and ornamented with a blue silk ribbon.

What if she knew the sort of life he had led!

He wondered where her uncle was. The colonel might hit up the booze, but he was none the less the gentleman. "What am I to rub elbows with him? Even if I am Mr. Richard Davies!" And wasn't the colonel a prince when it came to speaking English? He was!

"My uncle hasn't come home yet," said the girl, as he came down-stairs after a while. "I suppose that we shall have to wait for him—unless you're in a hurry."

"Me in a hurry? Say, what do you do around here at night?"

"After supper we talk—sometimes—and sometimes I try to play the organ, only it's not in very good condition. Sometimes I read to uncle. Sometimes he reads to me."

There was almost always that provisional sometimes in all she said. As she spoke, moreover, she turned, now with acute expectancy, again with lingering patience, to look in the direction whence she expected her uncle to appear.

"Where's he gone—the post-office again?"

"He can't have gone to the post-office," said the girl, "for St. Clair only gets one mail a day, and that's the first thing in the morning."

The sun had gone down. It was getting so dark that Mrs. Meckley, from behind her screen of Osage orange, could not make out much any more but two dim figures, one of them pale and one of them dark, seated on the steps of the stoop across the way.

"Scandalous, I call it," she repeated—repeated it

over and over, always as if with the lurking hope that the phrase would serve as an incantation to bring something scandalous about.

The crickets had been singing since a long time—a chirring pulsation of sound, as if it were the sound of a mill which itself was manufacturing the material of the night. Now and then a frog croaked in. And, across the deepening blue where the stars were beginning to shimmer, a few bats zigzagged, reeled, wavered swiftly out of sight.

"Do you want me to go and find out where he is?" Davies asked.

The girl shook her head.

"Aren't you afraid somethin' might 'a' happened to him?"

She sat motionless. It was so dark by this time that he could not see her expression. If she had answered, he had not heard.

"What are those queer little chippies scootin' around up there?"

Her voice reached him, strangled.

"Those are bats."

The conversation lapsed.

"Say," he exclaimed at last; "I don't want you to think I'm fresh, or trying to butt in; understand? But I sort of feel that the colonel's a friend of mine; see? And I'm going out to look for him."

"Will you?" she panted. "Oh, if I were a man!"

"I'm a man! What's the answer?"

The clairvoyance of the strain she was under helped her to understand.

"There's a place—you go up this street to the second corner, and then you turn to your left until you come to the last building on the left. I'm sure he's there."

"I'll just tell him you're sort of waiting."

"He may not want to come home."

"They never do. But, say——" He started to explain that he had been handling booze-fighters all his life, both friend and foe, but he checked himself. The girl wouldn't understand. He wound up by wondering where he had left his hat.

She brought it to him.

"Don't weaken," he said. "Keep a stiff upper lip."

"I will," she whispered.

But say, he wondered, what could it be like when the girl was all alone and the old gent out on a spree like this. He could see it all. The colonel had begun to get his spree properly started early in the day—maybe the night before, as it usually happened.

One thing was sure. He himself was feeling uncommonly fit. Apart from the fact that he was a little hungry, he had never felt in better shape in his life. This training out in the country was sure the real thing. His wind was perfect. His muscles had suppled up and hardened. The long sleep of the afternoon had ironed out his nerves. It was a pity that there wasn't a mill on with an open challenge. Say, feeling like this, he could just about lick anything between welter and light-heavy.

He was so absorbed in his thought, and the general fragrant quality of the night, that he barely noticed

what there was to be seen of this town he had stumbled into. Not much to be seen, anyway—a few lighted windows dimly visible through black bushes and trees, a smelly grocery store dimly lit by a kerosene-lamp, a white church closed and dark, more houses in the midst of yards, then a barber-shop, and this was the second corner the girl had mentioned.

He turned to the left.

It was the supper-hour, evidently, and every one indoors. He didn't meet a soul. Say, if the yeggs ever did discover this burg, it would be good-night-nurse for the local bank or anything else they'd want to crack. But the air was sure all right.

He breathed deeply. He was feeling so good that he shadow-boxed a little. He may have been Welsh, as the colonel had declared him to be. And the Welsh have the reputation of being a mystic race.

Was there some divine urge in all this spontaneous, unconscious preparation? And preparation for what, if not for some sort of a combat as Richard Davies—his right name—just now in his heart had hankered for?

He had just come in sight of what must have been the place the girl had mentioned, the last building up this street, brilliantly lighted as compared with the rest of the town by a number of oil-lamps with reflectors. A road-house or hotel, apparently well-patronized, with a dozen muddy autos and farm-wagons parked along its front. But what Davies particularly noticed was that there was a row in progress at that end of the building devoted to its bar.

He could hear the squabble of voices and laughter. He could catch a fleeting effect of shadows on the window—shadows that moved rapidly. He felt an instant surge of something almost like happiness, at first. This was the life. Say, this was almost like the Bowery. And he started to run.

But he was still a dozen yards from the door of the barroom when the nature of the thing that was happening struck him full tilt, stopped him and stopped his breath.

A familiar figure was being hustled through the door. That was the colonel they were flinging out, as Davies saw.

The colonel was flung out. He stumbled. He fell. He rolled.

"Oh!" A quick intake of the breath; and Davies felt as if he himself had been fouled—kicked—hit below the belt!

CHAPTER XVI

AGAINST ALL COMERS

THE colonel's slouch hat and his cane followed him—followed him so fast that they were in the dirt of the road at the colonel's side even before Davies himself got there.

He was enough of the fighter, both instinctive and trained, not to lose his temper. Anyway, it wasn't anger that was actuating him yet so much as sorrow. In that spectacle of the old man thrown into the street he saw the wreck of a lot of things—of pride and education, and of the affectionate hopes of that girl—that poor little kid—who was waiting now, all dressed up in her picnic clothes, back there in the big old house.

He was at the old man's side before the colonel himself could make a movement of recovery.

"Are you hurt?"

"Alvah!"

"This ain't Alvah. This is your old friend, Dick. Gimme your hand. What did those bums do to you?"

He wasn't asking the question for information precisely. He had seen well enough what had been done to the colonel. But he had to say something while he

was getting the colonel to his feet—had to do it to stifle his own mind if for no other reason.

The door of the barroom was becoming jammed by those who wanted to get the most out of the spectacle. Some had been pushed out of the door even, by friends behind who were struggling to get a better view. Most of the spectators were convulsed. This was the funniest thing they had seen for a long time. Gus sure had landed the colonel on his ear. But had you seen the colonel try to fight back? This would be a good lesson for the old rummy. Him talking about his honor!—and fighting duels! Some one should have landed him on his ear before.

Davies heard all this. The colonel must have heard it, too. The colonel was meek and humiliated. He wasn't greatly hurt in a physical way. None the less he had become the tottering old man. He hadn't been so drunk after all, or perhaps the misadventure had sobered him. Anyway, he cast a look of such utter chagrin, shame, weakness, appealing despair at this one last friend he had left in the world, that Davies felt something crack inside his heart.

He turned and walked straight over toward the group at the barroom door. He was so calm, and smooth, and swift that no one could have suspected what was up. Besides, Davies wasn't looking at any one in particular. His dark eyes were off at a slant. Still, he could see everything.

He saw the two nearest members of the jovial mob. They were both big men as to weight and stature. Both were laughing.

"Go on and laugh!" Davies advised.

He swung with his right and gave a straight-arm jolt with his left. The right landed on whiskers and a jaw. The left went on and on into the region of a solar plexus, but finally stopped against a weight so heavy that it was all he could do to push it over.

At that, he still had time and strength to shove an open-handed jab into another grinning face and jerk his elbow up under the chin of some one else.

"*Laugh, you bunch of mutts!*"

"*He's hit the commissioner! Kill him!*"

"*Git out o' my way!*"

"*Grab him, boys! Get him! Look out! You're walkin' on Mr. Crane!*"

"*I'll learn you to rough-house, yuh stiffs!*"

"*Look out, ding-dern ye! Help!*"

But it was not until he was in the barroom itself that Davies clearly perceived what he had come to seek. There was already a movement among those who had lingered at the bar to join the riot at the door. Davies had an eye for these. He sized them up *en masse*. He saw that they could have made up the average barroom crowd almost anywhere—in New York as much as in any village—riffraff, heavy respectables, lightweight sports and weaklings. But it was not for these that his attention was predestined.

He saw the bulking form of a man dressed in dirty white, bullet-headed, thick in the neck, making his way around the end of the bar, and he needed no label at all to tell him that this was the original victor in the fight with the colonel.

Everything had been going so fast that there had been no time as yet for readjustments.

They were still jostling each other over at the door trying to get a line on what had happened. Those at the bar were only sure of one thing, thus far, and that was that the colonel had been thrown out on his neck. Gus had told them so. And Gus himself may have thought that this fresh throb of excitement back of him was merely some sort of a fresh demonstration of enthusiasm for the prowess he had shown.

Then the lightning struck.

It was blinding at first—dazzling—making it hard to see just what had happened.

But Gus seemed to know. Rough-house, as he himself would have said, was his middle name. Nature had endowed him with the thews and the constitution of a bull, yet he had passed his life in saloons—in labor-camps and mill-towns, in the black valleys of Pennsylvania, along the waterfronts of Boston, Cleveland, San Francisco.

"*Look out!*"

Some one at the bar had that much sense.

Gus ducked. He turned a little to see that a stranger had entered the bar, and that the stranger was out for blood. Why hadn't some one tipped him off that the colonel had a son or something—somebody who was likely to come back? The slob had almost pasted him one while his back was turned.

But Gus was equal to the occasion—or thought that he was. He slid his bulk back of the bar, still crouching, conscious that on occasions like this somebody

was likely to shoot. He hoped that the mirror wouldn't be smashed. Still, it was better to have a smashed mirror than a bullet through the neck.

While all this was glancing through his elemental mind, his big paw had nevertheless shot out in the direction of his bung-starter—a slender mallet of heavy wood and a weapon as he had been trained to.

But he didn't get the chance to use it.

That enemy of his also knew something about barroom tactics—knew that there was apt to be an arsenal of sorts behind the wet counter. Say, this was just like a gang-fight, only he would have to be the gang all by himself.

And Davies took a short cut in an effort to reach the arsenal first. He slid right over the bar and landed on his feet. The next moment he had his two hands locked on the big barkeep's throat and was pushing him back toward the open.

It was desperate work—a welterweight against a heavy and no room to manœuver about in.

Gus flailed and kicked.

"I show you!"

"Will yuh?"

There was a crash of glass jangling down from a polished pyramid of glasses that had stood on the shelf back of the bar, and a trickle of red from the side of Gus's face.

And there they were in the open.

They stood there, face to face, a couple of yards between them, in the middle of the barroom—sawdust

on the floor, a drift of blue tobacco-smoke in the air, a subsidence of racket and confusion about them.

In the midst of it all, Davies heard a number of voices:

"*Rush him!*"

"*Git the marshal!*"

"*Git a gun! Git a rope!*"

It was evident that he wasn't going to have very much time to do whatever he had to do. A look of pain came into his face. He grabbed his left shoulder with his hand, lurched a little. A feint!

Gus rushed him, believing the stranger already hurt.

As he did so, however, Davies sidestepped and met him with a left hook to the chin. Then he heaved all his strength and weight into another right swing for the big man's neck. He landed.

Something whirled past Davies's head and smashed itself against the wall. Then the mob was invading the ring.

"*Missed him! Rush him! Help! Help! 'K'out, er y'll be hittin' Gus!*"

Davies's mind flashed him a picture of something like this that had happened before—a mill in a frowzy little fighting club, and the favorite getting the worst of it, and then the riot, with himself and his seconds fighting against such odds as these.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PEACE ANGEL

He did now what he did then. He zigzagged, too shifty and quick for anything to hit him except by accident. He didn't have far to go. And he had a chair. Just in time to wallop it down on the back of Gus's neck and shoulders, and the chair collapsed. So did Gus—for the moment he did—sprawled right on in the direction he had been going, legs spraddling, hands out.

Here is the thing that stamped itself on Davies's mind:

Gus was falling just as the colonel had fallen. Yea, bo, Gus had got his!

A long way of stating—and yet the only way to state it—the concept of an instant.

And then the crowd, as much as Davies himself, was aware that the collapsed chair was a very dangerous weapon—more dangerous than it was before it collapsed, for Davies had jerked it apart.

He flung the back of it like a whirling boomerang, and, before he heard the shattering of the mirror—if he heard it at all—he had jerked the solid seat of the chair straight into the welter of shapes in front of him. What he did with the rest of the chair

he never did exactly know. But there he was, at last, with a leg of the thing in his hand—and also the painful but certain knowledge in his brain that the next step might be murder.

He was ready for it. There are times when no man can turn back. This was one of them.

There was a momentary truce, at any rate.

"The next of youse guys," he panted, "who makes a false move—gets this!"

There was sufficient inspiration for a truce, especially on the part of the crowd—this stranger standing there like a black panther at bay, Gus sprawled on the floor, three or four other friends and neighbors scattered about bruised and bleeding, the big bar-mirror splintered, glasses smashed, all this as the swift sequence of a little low comedy natural to the ejection of an undesirable old customer.

But the truce couldn't possibly, in the nature of things, last very long. Another explosion was bound to follow. And one did.

Only it wasn't the kind they had looked for.

Davies saw it first. His attention had to be everywhere. The attention of the others was concentrated on him only.

He saw old Colonel Evan Williams coming in through the outer door, which was open. He saw that the colonel was not alone—saw that he was accompanied by Alvah Morley, his niece—and that Alvah, still in her picnic dress and without a hat, her straw-colored hair tied with a blue ribbon, was very stiff and very white. She was just like a dead girl who had come

to life and come walking into this place to make men feel ashamed of themselves.

She came accompanied by music, so far as Davies was concerned. In the tomblike silence that wallowed over everything and everybody like a descent of noiseless water, he could hear a fine, remote, phonographic record of that song she had sung in the morning:

"Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!"

She stared about her, whitely. She saw Davies, spoke to him with all emotion repressed:

"I am sorry that I let you come for my uncle. I waited a while, then thought that I had better come myself."

She was making a simple explanation. Her voice was cold and clear, soft yet penetrating.

Some one bawled:

"*You'd do better to keep him hum.*"

The girl gave a slow glance in the direction the voice came from, and silence descended again. Once more she turned to Davies.

"Go on!" he adjured. "It's all right. Take the colonel home! I'll 'tend to this mob!"

All the time that he spoke—and his sentences came out sharp and fast—he scattered his glances over the others in the room. Some were looking at the girl. Some looked at him. There was a tremor of suspended action. Peril in the air.

Yellow light. Sawdust floor, with Gus sprawled in

the center of it. Bar in the background. A stupid, bewildered crowd.

Tragedy! Drama!

Say, was this the village of St. Clair or the big man-eating, soul-mauling city whence he had fled? It was a thought that frightened him, right then and there, in the midst of all this excitement.

The crowd scuffled and muttered.

"Serves 'm right!"

"Who right?"

"Gus!"

"The colonel!"

"What's happened?"

"What's 'at she says?"

"Quit pushin'."

And then, Davies, thinking that he saw a movement to crowd the girl, jumped forward with his stick.

"Git back!" he grated, "er I'll send yuhs all to hell!"

There was a brief stampede which gave him elbow room. Yet the crowd was growing, swelled by fresh arrivals from other parts of the building and the street outside.

"This gentleman is my friend," the colonel cried.

"Take him out," Davies told the girl.

She eyed the crowd. She looked at him. All this was transpiring in lurid moments. The girl had put out her hand to his arm. There may have been some slight hint that she was losing her splendid grip on herself.

"I found him outside," she said. "He was trying to

get in. He wouldn't go without you. Are you ready to leave?"

Davies, still ready for action, eyed the crowd.

"Sure!"

Some one else spoke up.

"*He don't leave here except he's dead er goin' to jail!*"

Again the girl turned.

"You needn't hide, Sam Bosely! I suppose your folks will be glad to know you were here drinking again when you swore you wouldn't, and that on your bended knees."

"I did not," snarled Sam.

But there were cries of "Shut up!" and "Get out of the way."

A number of the citizens were salving the fallen barkeeper. In the midst of their efforts, Gus—under his own power, so to speak—got up as far as a sitting position.

"*Bring him some whisky!*"

Gus let out a roar: "Nobody go behind that bar but me."

He moaned and rocked. He felt the back of his head.

The girl was letting her cool eyes focus on face after face. Some of the men she looked at backed away and made ready to depart.

"Beat it," said Davies. "This is my scrap. I don't need any help."

"This is my battle, sir," the colonel broke in.

There may have been those present who thought that

this was a signal for a resumption of the comedy. It was about time for a reaction. And they were right in a way, but not altogether. The colonel had broken away from his niece. He was completely sobered. That was evident. He stood there solidly, with his feet wide apart, his gnarled cane gripped in one hand, his slouch hat in the other.

But again the girl interposed.

"I know you all," she said. "If you do anything to this young man you'll all be there as witnesses—you, Mr. Snow, with your sister-in-law as a character witness; and you, Hank Purvy, expecting to marry a woman whose husband's not dead yet; and you, Caspar Clark, after breaking your mother's heart."

"*'Tain't so!*"

"*She's got ye, Hank!*"

"*Ye'er a liar!*"

But the girl's quiet voice dominated the other voices.

"Your license goes"—she was facing Gus, who was still staggered, but able to stand—"if it takes the rest of my life."

"My God!" bellowed Gus. "As if I ain't got trouble enough."

"Close yer yip," said a tough young farmer, shifting his eyes from the girl to Gus. "Close yer yip, yuh big fat ferriner. If yuh don't——"

The girl turned coldly to her uncle and Davies.

"Come on," she said, "we'll go."

They went.

They left the barroom without haste, and not a word or a hand was raised to stay them. Davies even

lingered a moment. It was to speak a word to the tough young farmer. Just one word:

"Thanks!"

But the young farmer was even too tough for such brief amenities. He looked away. And Davies, smiling slightly, but still with that chair-leg in his hand in case of emergency, followed the colonel and his niece out into the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TOUCH DIVINE

THEY walked in silence, and they walked slowly, until they were well beyond the zone of light and sound that encompassed the hotel. At first, the colonel was between Davies and the girl. They were supporting him, for he still tottered. He was like one who would have collapsed, and would have done so willingly, were it not for the strength they were lending him.

"Richard," said the colonel, weakly.

"Yes, sir."

"I trust that you were not hurt."

"They never touched me."

"They were cowards," breathed the girl with suppressed tumult.

"Not cowards," the colonel protested. "They defied me. But they were not gentlemen. They took me unawares."

"If it hadn't been for you folks," Davies declared with ebbing passion, "I would have just about croaked a couple of those yahoos and taken my chance at the chair."

"I beg pardon," said the colonel. He explained: "I'm a little deaf in my right ear, Richard. Let me walk on the other side of you." They shifted their

positions, and Davies was next to the girl. "You behaved with the utmost gallantry," the colonel pursued. "You showed your Welsh descent. 'Twas thus they fought—your ancestors and mine—under Rhodri Mawr and Owen Glendower."

"They were easy."

"Easy for one who bears the name of Richard Davies. Blood will tell. One gentleman like you is always worth a score from the mob."

Davies was silent. Should he speak up—tell them who he was and where he came from? What sort of a life he had lived? Who his associates had been? Why not? He couldn't go on fooling a friend. And this old man was his friend. It made him feel ashamed of himself. Why not come right out and tell the colonel all about it, then make a getaway?

While he was thus debating with himself, and the colonel was talking on and on, in an effort to cover up the awkwardness of the situation and conceal his own confusion, something happened that held Davies silent, caused a faint tremor to run through him—to run through him body and soul, so he himself would have confessed had he been given to that form of speech.

And yet it was nothing much, this thing that had happened.

At first it was a mere touch on his arm.

"My father and mother passed out when I was pretty young," he had begun.

And then Alvah had taken his arm. The light and slender curve of her palm was about his elbow. At first

he thought that this was a mere gesture of impulse. Then the pressure, although still light, became fixed and real.

"It is a pity, Richard," the colonel said. "They would have been proud of you."

Davies could not tear his attention away from the feel of the girl's light hand. She trusted him as much as the colonel did. That was clear. Should he let her also know that he had been a crook all his life, one of the most expert pickpockets—if he did say it himself!—that even New York had known? But right on top of this question came some fierce assertion from his heart that she was right in trusting him, that he was to be trusted.

It was still early, but the dark village lay somnolent about them. The maple-trees that lined the path and the vines and bushes—rose and honeysuckle, syringa and lilac—that filled the dewy front yards transformed the street into a temple, dusky, mysterious, where miracles might be performed. All this impressed itself on Davies somewhat like the charge of a spiritual mob. Should he prove himself any less of a fighter in the presence of this mob than he had in the presence of that other?

He deliberately looked at the girl, although his glance was brief. He wondered how he could have thought of her as a kid. He couldn't even think of her as a woman—not in the terms of womanhood such as he had always known.

Tall, slender, dimly white, a look of pain and grief

and desire on her face, all these veiled to some extent by a dominant courage.

"My parents also died when I was young," she said.

And her eyes met Richard's. Only for a second, and yet for a long time after he was looking ahead again he could recall the look.

"I've lived a pretty hard life," he said.

This time, Alvah did press his arm. There was no mistaking it. Nor was there any mistaking of the meaning of it.

"Brace up!" was what the pressure said.

All this time the colonel was speaking, but his words had become a monologue with himself for audience. As for Davies, he walked alone with this girl at his side. It was almost as if she herself did not exist—not as an earthly entity—so far as Davies was concerned.

What if his friends and pals back in New York could see him now? Wouldn't they laugh? They would. They'd wonder what he was up to. They wouldn't understand. They wouldn't understand that the touch of this clean and decent hand on his arm was something wonderful and strange.

Perhaps the street had become a temple where miracles could be wrought. Inwardly, Davies was panting. It was with a stress of emotion which he did not analyze.

As soon as he could, he went up to his room with the small brass lamp that the girl told him would be his. He closed the door. He found that there were wooden shutters at the window, still more or less effective despite the absence of numerous slats. He closed

the shutters. He put the lamp on the floor and brought out his suit-case from where he had shoved it under the bed.

There was some spare linen and a few toilet articles in the suit-case, not much. Its principal contents comprised about half a hundred cakes of soap in small and savory packages of polished and gaily printed paper.

This thing of being a soap-agent had struck him as just a trifle better than anything else when he was getting away from New York. A former friend had given him the tip, long ago, that a soap-agent's path led to pleasure and profit, should he ever care to disappear from the big town for any length of time.

Only the motive had been different from those his friend had implied. He had been starting clean, and soap meant cleanliness. And soap was something that he could talk about, urge folks to use. It was something that he liked and was fond of using himself.

He looked at the supply on hand.

Should he take it with him, or should he leave it? It was heavy. Word was likely to be sent for miles around, to the marshals and constables, the sheriffs and small-town police, to be on the lookout for a soap-agent who had roughed things in St. Clair. And yet, if he left his soap behind, wouldn't he be bidding good-by right then to this new life of his? Wouldn't he? And how long would it be before he was back at the old trade again? Easy money!

Again, in imagination, he could feel the touch of Alvah Morley's hand on his arm. Say, that was

what he was running away from. And yet he would take it with him. It would be there always.

Yep!

Just when he was going to gyp somebody's leather, there would come that touch on his arm and he would lose his nerve.

CHAPTER XIX

BOUND HAND AND FOOT

He closed the suit-case and strapped it. He took a bill-fold from his hip-pocket and from this extracted a five-dollar bill. He put the lamp on the decrepit night-table and the bill under the lamp where the girl would be sure to find it. He blew out the light. He picked up his heavy suit-case and made his way silently out into the hall. He hated to leave like this. He would have liked to say good-by. But what was the use? His conscience was clear. The five would cover everything.

He was half-way down the stairs on his way to the front door, moving with all the caution he could master, when a sound of movement and voices made him halt and hold his breath.

The colonel and the girl were down there. He had believed them to be in their rooms, possibly asleep. They hadn't even come upstairs. At least, the colonel hadn't. From the girl's first words it was evident that she had been looking for the colonel, had just found him.

"You mustn't stay there in the dark," she said gently. "Come, now. Go to bed—and sleep. Tomorrow you will be feeling better."

The colonel's response was an indistinct murmur.

Alvah was carrying a lamp. She and the colonel appeared from the back parlor. They paused at the foot of the opposite flight of the double stairway. They were so close that Davies did not dare to move one way or the other. At least, he was in comparative darkness. As for Alvah and her uncle, they had the light of the lamp in their eyes.

"I am overwhelmed," the colonel confessed.

He looked it. He was flabby. Shriveled would be the better word. Ten years had been added to his age. He was a man not yet recovered from a deadly sickness. His voice had that sort of feebleness about it that betokens a lack of breath.

"You shouldn't be overwhelmed," Alvah chided as she might have spoken to a misguided child.

"Alvah!"

"Yes, uncle, dear."

"I must tell you."

"What?"

"I tried to keep it from you."

Alvah put down her lamp on one of the upper steps.

"You mean about there being no more money left?" she demanded softly. She even tried to put a playful note into the words. She put out her two hands and took her uncle's hands in hers. "I know. I knew it the moment I saw the sign you put out. I was merely a little slow to believe."

"It is all gone."

"I can work, earn enough for both of us."

"The drink was my ruination."

"And then," Alvah hurried on, still with that assumption of consoling lightness—"and then, the sign did serve a good purpose."

"I muddled on, expecting the lightning somehow to strike."

"And didn't it?" Alvah drew her uncle down to a place on the steps. She seated herself at his feet. She smiled up into his face wistfully. "What better good fortune could have befallen us than to have Mr. Davies come when he did? We'll put out the sign again."

The old man awoke from his depression.

"Mr. Davies! God bless the boy!"

Davies, standing on the steps across the hall, felt a little creep of goose-flesh on his body. It was as if some one had tickled him. He cursed himself—without the use of words—for being where he was. He wanted to speak, but he couldn't speak. It was impossible for him to move.

"Could we want a better lodger?"

"He was a friend to me. He was a son. But now he'll be leaving us. It is only right that he should. It is what I should advise him to do. He was a son to me, and I have driven him away."

"Nonsense! Do you think that he's the sort who runs away?"

"No; he's as brave as a lion."

"What then?"

"He is a gentleman. I have disgraced him."

"He knows you're sorry. There's no disgrace. Fight on! Isn't that the motto you've been following all these years you've been here in St. Clair trying to

settle up Uncle Abner's estate? Haven't you told me that that was what the Welsh—what the Cymry—did under Rhodri Mawr?—and what Stonewall Jackson did during the 'seven days'? Don't you suppose—don't you suppose," she demanded, while her voice fell to little more than a thrilling whisper, "that there's a Higher Power that knows all about your needs? Who can tell but that it was that Higher Power who sent Mr. Davies here."

Davies heard all this. And he had the time to meditate it, too. For there was a long silence, and in this the girl's words reëchoed.

"Aye! He came as one sent by the Lord. To-night I stood at Armageddon, and it was as if I had been among the spirits of devils, and they were gathered to the battle of God Almighty, His day. And Richard came to me, Alvah—came to me like one of the seven angels bearing the vials of the wrath of God."

The colonel was running into a mystic mood.

"He taught them a lesson," said Alvah. "It was a lesson they needed. It was a lesson that they'll never forget."

"God moves in a mysterious way. I little thought, when I saw Mr. Davies this morning, that—no, I did know it. Something told me the moment that I saw his face that here was a friend, that here was some one destined to play a part in the lives perhaps of both of us. What is that the Good Book says? 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers'—it all comes back to me—'for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' "

Again the silence settled down. Again Davies found himself as in a state of suspended animation. He felt as a spirit might feel when hovering over the dead body that had belonged to it during the earthly incarnation.

There was one choked voice speaking from the silence: *"They've got me wrong!"*

But there was another voice, small and clear: *"Why not?"*

Why not be the thing they were believing him to be? It was as if he stood on the edge of a measureless gulf and contemplated the possibility of flight.

"Did you notice," the girl asked, "how they were all afraid to move or speak as we went away?" It was a mere whisper, a question not calling for an answer. "They were afraid."

The colonel had dropped his head forward and rested it in his hands. The girl did not disturb his reflection. She sat motionless and looked off into the shadows. The lamplight shone down on the two of them and made a picture that slowly burned itself into Richard Davies's memory. What was he that he should be treated to a picture like this? What right had he to look at it?

He stood there, flattened against the wall, and he was like some one or some thing that has been annihilated.

Who was this they had talked about? It couldn't be himself, although they had used his name; and this no mere sobriquet of the streets, either, but the name his father had borne before him.

He looked back on his immediate past, but the one

big fact that stuck out of it—like a peak from a cloud —was the girl's hand on his arm. She had shown then the sort of faith that she had in him. It wasn't the old Chick whose arm she had taken. It was the arm of some one named Mr. Richard Davies. Yet, who was this Mr. Richard Davies?

"*Me!*"

"*No; it ain't you.*"

"*But it will be.*"

For, as yet, he was still annihilated in every respect except that of his fluttering, disrupted thought. His mouth was open.

Then the colonel straightened up. He spoke to the girl, but he did not look at her. He also peered off into the shadows.

"Alvah, you are right. Altogether right. But most right in keeping your faith in the Power that sent us this friend in need. The Lord was watching over me, even while I was writing that card. It was He who brought Mr. Davies to our door."

The girl put out her hand and caressed his face. As the colonel slowly turned his head and looked at her, Davies could see the grief and contrition in the old man's eyes. It recalled the look he had seen in the face of old Ezra Wood, and it summoned to his own heart the same vague hunger—the same white awe—that had been there that night in the Boone House.

"Alvah," the colonel said, "let's you and me—get down on our knees—here and now—and thank Him for sending us such a friend and gentleman—as Mr. Davies."

CHAPTER XX

PARTNERS

DAVIES fled.

He went up the stairs taking his suit-case with him. But he went like a ghost, making no more noise than a shadow. Perhaps he wouldn't have cared so very much if he had made a noise. There are crises in the lives of every one when the ordinary conventions—and even the ordinary decencies, so called—count for nothing. And this was one of them.

He reached the room he had deserted only a few minutes before. He went in. He closed the door behind him. He dropped his suit-case on the floor. He wilted back against the door and stood there, mentally haggard if not physically haggard, and stared unseeingly into the gloom.

But he was not altogether bereft of vision.

Only what he saw was the series of pictures he had brought back with him from the hall, chiefly the last picture of all, wherein an old man and a young girl were kneeling side by side humbly thanking God for sending them such a friend as Mr. Richard Davies.

By and by, Davies recovered possession of himself to such an extent that he picked up his suit-case and thrust it back into the place from which he had taken

it. He relighted the lamp. Several times he paced the length of the room. He stepped over to the door, finally, and opened it wide. It was not long before the thing happened which he had expected.

There was a knock at the side of the door, and there was the voice of Colonel Williams asking him if he had not yet retired.

"Come in," Davies invited.

The colonel came in. He said something about the possible desirability of extra covers for the bed, the unseasonable coolness of the night. Davies smiled upon him, thrust forward the single chair in the room, which was near the bed. He held the chair while the colonel eased his weight into it. Then Davies seated himself on the bed.

"The covers and everything are all right, colonel. But I'm glad you came. I was wanting to talk to you."

For the first time since the colonel had entered the room, their eyes met and held.

"Richard, I have come to apologize."

"No apologies are needed—not from you."

"As one gentleman to another——"

"Wait a minute, colonel."

Davies was still smiling, but there was a whiteness in his smile, as he himself could feel. What he could not feel, perhaps, was how deeply brilliant his dark eyes burned in the yellow twilight made by the little lamp. The colonel, looking at him, must have had a vision of mystic warriors on Welsh battle-fields. But the colonel waited.

"I've got to tell you something," Davies went on.

"My parents were all right. I believe they were. I know they were. See? But I've spent most of my life among grafters and thieves." He lurched out the rest of it hurriedly. "I was one myself."

The old colonel wasn't looking at him any longer. He hadn't shifted his eyes, precisely. It was rather a change of focus. The colonel was looking, mistily, through him and beyond him. His old face—misty eyes, droopy nose, white and monumental mustache—had become a portrait of earthly wisdom. It was a very human face, humorous and sad. The colonel had made a slight gesture with his hand. Otherwise he did not express himself. But Davies was finding it easier to go on than he may have expected.

"It was the easy money that made it seem so good to me," he said. "Easy money, even when I was a little shaver and could swipe a tool or something from a new building or a sidewalk where I was supposed to be collecting firewood. A trip to John the Junkman, and there you were! And there were two or three times when I thought that I was going straight, but it was easy money that always switched me back—in a phony gambling-house—where I put down a ten and saw it turn into fifty, and I left the fifty and saw it run to a thousand. But I never went back. I was always too wise for that. I would never get caught. And it was like that when I brushed up against a young swell in the Polo Grounds and almost everything he had dropped right out of his pocket into mine. Easy money! Easy money!"

The colonel nodded his head slowly several times, and

at the end of a nod, with his head lowered, he kept it that way and remained motionless.

"Until at last," said Davies, "I did take a tumble to what it all meant and what it was all leading to.

"You never get anything for nothing. You've got to pay the price for everything you get. I saw it right. I saw it whole.

"And if I didn't want to pay the price like all the other thieves and grafters—or almost all—it was me for the country where I could work it out—something of what I owed—or all of it, even—square myself—you understand—out here in the country where the decent people live, and you don't have to lock your doors at night, and where every other person that you meet ain't a grafter or a crook."

"I understand," the colonel murmured, and he slowly tugged at his silvery mustache as a preliminary to further expression of his own. "I understand."

"I wanted to tell you this," Davies continued, his voice going smaller. "I may be sticking around here for a while, you know, just to see how things turn out. But I couldn't do it and let you folks go on believing that I was something that I ain't."

His diminishing voice came to a rather abrupt pause, as if he had suddenly discovered that he had said everything that he had to say.

The colonel was looking at him again—out of the top of his eyes.

"I understand, Richard," the colonel announced. "I've known all along what you were. What you've

been telling me has merely confirmed my first judgment of you."

"You knew——"

The colonel slowly reached for something that made a weight in the tail-pocket of his coat. It was something that did not come easily. It required considerable time and effort to extract it. When it did come, it revealed itself as the colonel's flask. There was still a finger or so of whisky in it. The colonel held the flask up where it would catch the light. He slowly rocked the liquor back and forth.

There, for an interval, Davies may have been expecting the colonel to pull the cork, invite him again to take a drink. There would have been nothing surprising about such an action. In the world Davies came from this was the usual climax to an emotional passage.

But the colonel, still with the flask in his hand, got thoughtfully to his feet.

"—knew that you were sent," he murmured.

He trudged over to one of the shuttered windows opening on the garden. He pushed a shutter open.

Davies, watching him, saw the colonel uncork the flask and empty its contents into the outer darkness. He saw the old man remain there, apparently absorbed in thought for yet a moment or so longer, then toss the flask away.

A midnight funeral!

The flask fell into a bed of pansies that Alvah Morley had been cultivating down there ever since her advent in the old house. The pansies grew lush, and were generous with their flowers—purple and soft and faintly

fragrant. There can be no earthly record of what the pansies thought when the bottle arrived among them. But they accepted it without protest, received it tenderly—gladly, one would be tempted to believe—the expiatory sacrifice of some fragile human flower!

Pansies for thoughts!

The colonel remained for a rather long time at the window, letting the breeze of the night blow in upon him. It stirred his white mustache and the folds of his coat.

When he turned, there was a different look in his face. His expression conveyed an appearance of enlightenment, of added wisdom—a wisdom no less human than was habitual to him, but not quite so terrestrial perhaps. He smiled gently at the youth who was watching him.

He put out his hand.

Wondering a little, yet touched with understanding, thrilled not a little with some quiver of relief that was almost joy, Richard Davies got up and seized the colonel's hand.

"My boy," said the colonel, "my boy——"

"I was afraid——"

"A man need never fear any one but himself."

"I couldn't let you believe——"

"A man is not hurt by lies, sir, but by the truth; and the truth won't hurt him when he's right. God bless you—and good night!"

CHAPTER XXI

"WELCOME TO OUR CITY"

THERE may have been something in that aphorism of the colonel's about the truth being salutary so long as a man was right.

The news of what had happened at the hotel the night before had spread. This news alone would have been enough to make Davies a person of note in St. Clair—one to be considered and looked up to, especially by the ladies of the town; and, far from being hurt by the inevitable untruths stitched onto the fabric of fact, these added details merely increased his renown.

But Davies wasn't caring very much what people said, either one way or the other. "A man is injured not by lies, sir, but by the truth! And the truth won't hurt him when he's right." That was good enough for him. And he prepared to set forth on his day's work.

So did Mrs. Meckley.

Mrs. Meckley had gone to bed late and had risen early. She had done this with a pleasant consciousness of duty. Some one had to keep St. Clair posted as to the doings across the street. It was barely nine o'clock when she sallied forth. She had already caught a distant glimpse of her neighbor, Mrs. Sanders, trowel-

ing bulbs in her front yard a hundred yards farther on toward the center of town.

"I just saw that young man," Mrs. Meckley began.

"Who? The one that kicked up the rumpus last night at the hotel?" Mrs. Sanders turned to the black earth and scooped out another bulb.

"What say?"

"Thought everybody in town knew about it by this time."

"I just saw him saying good-by," Mrs. Meckley persisted weakly.

"Better say good-by. I reckon he's about done his share."

"You mean flirting——"

"Serves 'em right, guzzlin' an' smokin'!"

Mrs. Meckley thought she saw a lead. She dropped her voice, narrowed her eyes.

"There was a light in his window till after midnight," she tempted.

But Mrs. Sanders hadn't wasted all her ammunition, not by a jugful. She gathered up her bulbs in a small box, made a straining effort, and got to her feet.

"I'm talkin' about Deacon Crane and County Commissioner Miller gettin' their faces smacked, and that little squirt of an Ed Hall—I should think his mother *would* go out with a new silk dress on every week—gettin' his lip split; not to speak of the riffraff that usually does hang around the saloon, all gettin' a tannin'."

"Milly Sanders!"

"Learn 'em a lesson. They ought to 'a' knowed he was the colonel's adopted son."

It wasn't long before Mrs. Meckley discovered that she was in a hurry—that she was already late, in fact—on an errand that would take her further on her way. Even so, she wasn't quick enough. She saw that she was behind her schedule the moment her eyes lit on the faces of the Beverly sisters. They also had the news.

Only, this time, Mrs. Meckley wasn't unprepared. She whispered something into the somewhat wilted ears of the sisters.

"But he hasn't ever been married," said the elder Miss Beverly.

"That's what I'm telling you," said Mrs. Meckley, and she whispered again. "And I think it's just scandalous, the old reprobate aiming to marry off the girl like this to his own son. Well, good-by, both of you. I got to be trotting along."

She trotted, and the Beverly sisters decided that they would go out in the back garden to see whether Mrs. Mintner was still at her curtain frames.

"I don't see why she persists in calling the judge a reprobate," said the younger Miss Beverly with a touch of malice.

"No," said the elder, with perfect understanding. "She's been setting her cap for Colonel Williams long enough, goodness knows!"

"And he never would look at her," said the younger Miss Beverly, pinking up.

Meantime, Mr. Richard Davies, with that aphorism

of the colonel's in mind and conscious that he had come off first best in the proceedings of the night before whatever might be said about it, started out to see what sort of an impression he could make on the town as a soap-agent. He remembered the instructions that had been handed to him on a printed card at the soap-headquarters in Greenwich Street:

> Work every house.
> If they look poor, remember the poor are easy.
> If they look rich, tell them so, and they'll fall.

He had his suit-case with the half-hundred cakes in it, also a deck of business-cards. His first try was the house right across the street—a little house back of a high hedge; but no one was home and he had to leave a card.

The next house he tried was up the street, where a woman was digging bulbs.

"Good morning," he said. "Harvesting your onions?"

The woman looked up from her work, recognized him as the town's latest arrival. She smiled as she said: "These were early tulips."

"I know you don't need it," he said amiably; "but I'm introducing the new Saporino line of Mexican mystery soaps. The name sounds rather bunk; but they really are good soaps; use them myself."

He gave Mrs. Sanders the help of his hand. She was old enough to compliment him frankly:

"You're a good advertisement."

Any one would have been justified in saying as much.

He was clean, immaculate, even though he was a little shabby.

"Well, you see," he confessed, "I love this soap so much I feel as if I was doing folks a favor by letting them have it—twenty-five a cake and better than a novel or a play."

"He ain't the bruiser they were makin' him out to be," said Mrs. Sanders, looking after him.

He had made the sale.

He could have cleaned out his entire stock to the Beverly sisters. He knew that he could, the moment that they pounced upon him with their eyes. It was evident that he had been well advertised. The ruction at the hotel had been a good thing after all.

The elder of the two addressed him from the porch:

"Good morning, Mr. Williams."

"What's that?"

"Aren't you Colonel Williams's—er——"

Davies got a portion of her meaning.

"No relation," he smiled. "I wish I was. I'm introducing the Saporino line——"

And he recited his familiar patter.

"Isn't it rather expensive?"

"Use ordinary soap to get the rough dirt off, although we recommend our customers to use the Saporino line exclusively. Ah, go on, and take a dozen cakes. Two bits per! I could tell right away that you ladies had been to New York and knew all about the Saporino line——"

With Mrs. Meckley as an advance agent, his fame was reaching into quarters where it hadn't reached

before. But Davies was cautious. It was almost too good to be true, this glad-hand welcome he was getting wherever he went. He scented something in the air. Nor was he very long in finding out that he was right, and what the danger was.

He had just sold his last cake of soap when he saw a familiar figure sauntering along the maple-shaded street. It was that tough young farmer who had threatened to give Gus a wallop on his own account the night before.

Davies was glad to see him. He was tired of talking to women. He strolled up to meet him.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello," and the young farmer, with a shrewd glance, backed up to lean against the fence.

"Come and have a cigar with me," Davies invited.

"Don't care if I do."

There was a small cigar and candy store across the street.

"Give us a couple of your best cigars," said Davies to the alert but unshaven young merchant behind the counter.

"Nickel straight," said the merchant, taking two cigars from a box in the glass case.

And his eyes were as keen as a hawk's until he had his dime.

"Here comes the bus for Pleasantville," the farmer remarked softly and casually when they were outside again.

"Let her come," said Davies, only mildly interested. "I guess this town will hold me for a while."

The other snorted softly.

"It'll hold you longer'n you think, if you don't watch out."

"On account of what happened at the hotel?"

"That's what started it. But nobody wants nothing done about that for fear of gettin' drug into court themselves, like Miss Morley said. But they've got the constable primed up to run you in for sellin' without a license."

He shot a swift glance up the street toward the center of town. His voice speeded up a notch.

"And here he comes now!"

CHAPTER XXII

JUSTICE: THAT'S ALL

His first instinct was to run away. Without looking particularly he could see that his chances for flight were good. The street was loosely gardened to left and right. The open country at no place was far away —meadows, flowing cornfields, patches of wood. His suit-case was empty. There would be no great loss if he abandoned it. He had always hated the prospect of jail. Now, with a splurge of feeling, he knew that he was hating it more than ever—even though it should mean but a day or two—on such a feeble charge as peddling soap without a license.

His mind was working fast.

The constable, moreover, was taking his time.

Davies flashingly reviewed his previous life, the change that had come into it—and that change particularly which he had experienced since his arrival at Flowery Harbor.

It helped him to check his instinct to run. It helped him to check that other instinct, which was to bluff —play the indignant, assume the rôle of injured innocence, threaten reprisals in a political way.

"What are you going to do about it?" the young farmer asked.

"Square myself," Davies replied. "So long! Thanks!"

Davies met the constable at the side of a low fence fringing a garden. Beyond the garden was a lane. There was another lane just across the way, and this ran off down a slope between other garden fences to a willowy hollow. There was still a good chance to get away, but all the time Davies was getting a better grip on himself.

He and the man of the law surveyed each other.

The constable was a man of middle age—a trifle fat, a trifle dirty, but keen-eyed and efficient. He was chewing tobacco. He slowly masticated. He spat to one side. His eyes came back to Davies's eyes.

"I reckon," he said, without other preliminaries, "you know who I am."

"You're the constable."

The other squinted down at a nickel-plated badge on the lapel of his coat. He burnished it with his sleeve.

"And you're the young feller," he said, as if announcing a happy surprise, "who's been sellin' inside the corporate limits without a license. I guess I'll have to ask you to step along with me."

"I'm ready."

"You seem to take it sort of cool."

"Why shouldn't I? I haven't been doing anything wrong. I didn't know I had to have a license."

"Ignorance of the law ain't no defense," the constable recited.

"I'm willing to get a license."

"I suppose so," said the constable, with a flash of malice, "now that the crime has been committed."

The constable was still leisurely. There was an air about him of preoccupation, of not having said all that he had to say. And Davies noticed this.

"What do you think I'd better do about it?"

"That's for the squire to say, although he do generally follow my recommend."

"And what's that?"

"The lock-up." He snapped out the words. "It largely depends on what I say—and on what you might call public sentiment."

"With no chance to get off with a fine?"

The constable slanted a meaning look at Davies. He casually glanced up and down the all but deserted street.

"Now you're beginning to say somethin'," he mused.

Again he shot a look at Davies.

"Well, come along," he said. "We'll be gettin' off to the lock-up."

"Have a cigar," said Davies.

"Don't mind if I do."

He took the cigar that the prisoner offered and bit the end from it. Davies held a match for him.

"Do you mean that I might get off all right with a fine?"

"How much money you got?"

"I don't know; but it ought to be enough."

The constable lowered his voice, spoke a little more quickly than he had spoken hitherto.

"I ain't one of these here officers that won't listen

to reason," he averred with a touch of nervous eagerness. "I'm broad-minded enough, if it comes to that. Got to be, b' heck! I got a family." He wasn't altogether hardened. He appeared to be a little disconcerted. He ran on, with a trace of nervous laughter. "Some folks went through here just the other day, bustin' the speed-limits in one of these here big purple cars, and they'd been goin' on like that yet if I hadn't nabbed them, and the feller who was steerin', he says to me, just like that, says he: 'Be you one of these here officers that won't listen to reason?' 'How so?' says I. 'Why,' says he, 'if you ain't,' says he, 'mebbe you'll let me pay the fine right here and now,' says he."

"How much was the fine?" Davies inquired.

"In his particular case, it was a five-dollar bill."

"Can't I pay my fine right here?"

"Not right here," the constable whispered, "unless you're mighty keerful about it."

"I'll be careful."

Davies was as good as his word. He cast a cautious look about him. He turned his face to the fence and deftly drew his billfold. He counted out five one-dollar bills. But the constable was not so cautious. At any rate, the sight of the stranger's money seemed to interest him more than any chance of some one discovering his method of executing the law. His keen eyes counted the five bills as Davies counted them, and also took note of all the other money in the fold.

"I reckon," he breathed, "that your fine will be just twice that much."

"You ought to go to some bigger town," said Davies

briefly, after the transfer had been made. But he kept his temper. "How do I know that they won't make trouble for me when I go to get my license even now?"

The constable was in high good humor.

"I guess you needn't worry about that," he said. "Just let on like nothin's happened. Keep your mouth shut, and nothin's goin' to hurt you. Catch the four seventeen."

"But I want to be all on the square," said Davies. "I expect to stay here a while. I'm not going out on the four seventeen."

"Oh, you're not!"

"You've let your cigar go out," said Davies. He lit a fresh match. "And you've let some ashes fall on your coat." He brushed the constable's collar lightly while that officer was busy with the match and the gift cigar. "Can't you go around to the town hall with me and tell them there that I'm all right?"

"I'm sorry," said the officer; "but it's just about my dinner-time."

They sauntered along together for perhaps a distance of fifty paces, and all this time there was a sort of buzzing in Davies's brain. Then, what was that the colonel had said about men being hurt by the truth, unless they happened to be right? Davies eyed the constable.

"I thought," he said carelessly, "that you had a badge."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

"Miss Tessie," said the constable, about a quarter of an hour later, "this young man's a friend of mine, Mr. Richard Davies, recently of New York, and he wants a license to sell goods in St. Clair. I reckon you can fix him out all right."

"Indeed I can," said Miss Tessie.

She was a blond creature of a sort which can be adequately described only by the use of the phrase "magnificently developed." At the dinner hour—midday in St. Clair—she was about the only one left in the town hall, and, with nothing else to do, she had remarked the advent of the constable and the dark-eyed stranger with a flutter of interest.

"Thanks," said Davies. He had turned to the constable and thrust out his hand.

As the constable's hand took Davies's, the officer felt the smooth surface of his lost badge against the palm of his hand. He mastered his astonishment to some extent.

"I told you you'd find your badge as soon as you'd square me here in the town hall," Davies whispered. "Are you and me going to be friends from now on?"

Perhaps the constable understood precisely what had

happened. Possibly he guessed that this stranger had deftly relieved him of his badge back there in the street when presumably brushing the ashes from his coat. But it isn't likely. It didn't matter very much. The man of the law had his ten dollars in his pocket and now he had his badge as well. He was in a softened mood. He looked at the New Yorker, and over his face came the expression of an upright friend.

"Count on me," said the constable. "I ain't afraid of these local politicians. I've just been elected, and my job's still got two years to run." The constable again addressed himself to the young lady beyond the office railing. "I'll leave you young folks together," he declared.

Davies's own attention had become riveted on Miss Tessie. He believed, and it may have been true, that he had never seen any creature more beautiful. Her smile was so frank and inviting, moreover, that he made no attempt to conceal his admiration.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she softly inquired.

"Can you blame me?" he breathed. "I could keep right on looking at you forever, Miss Tessie."

"My name is Miss Wingate, thank you."

"You could call me Sweeny, if you wanted to."

"I thought Mr. Winch said you were Mr. Richard Davies."

"Dick, for short."

"I think you're awful," she said, "to tease a poor, innocent, little country girl like that."

"Rosy cheeks and a shiny eye," Davies quoted.

"Shiny nose, you mean," she countered.

She had a little purse with a mirror in the top of it, and she looked at herself in this. Quite unabashed, she dusted her nose with a small powder-puff.

"Anyway," he said, "I'm glad to meet you."

The noon-hour was quiet in St. Clair—no traffic to speak of in the several streets, every one gone home to dinner with the exception of a few loafers here and there, a few somnolent clerks in the stores, Miss Tessie Wingate the sole tenant of the town hall against such time as Simp Fisher, the village auditor, should come back chewing his tooth-pick. The girl had surrendered her smooth pink fingers to Davies's hand and allowed them to linger there.

For an eternal moment Davies had a rather giddy feeling that this was New York, and that a spell had fallen upon the world, and that he and this girl were the only ones left awake in it. Her voice came to him on an accompaniment of bird-music; it was like a vocalization of the warm and fragrant lazy air that drifted in through the open windows.

"What can I be thinking of, and you such a terrible person!"

"Why, terrible?"

"The way you cleaned out the hotel barroom, last night."

"So you know about it, too?"

"Of course I do. The whole town knows about it."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry! I think it's wonderful."

She engulfed him in a look from her large, blue eyes.

"You're the wonderful thing," he asserted sincerely.

"How many other girls have you told that to?"

"None."

"I've always been just dying to go to New York."

"Don't."

"It must be awfully exciting."

"Just like it is for a chicken getting the ax."

Miss Tessie jerked her hand away suddenly.

A tall young man, exceedingly thin, lightly dressed, his straw hat on the back of his head as if to relieve the pressure on his bulging and scantily thatched forehead, strolled into the room with an air of belonging there. He had a thin mustache, and this only partly concealed the difficult trick he was performing of turning a toothpick, end over end, with lips and tongue unaided by his hands.

He had no look for the others there as he slouched through the gate in the railing, nor did Miss Wingate have more than a glance for him. He slumped into a chair beside a desk, propped up his feet and began to file his nails.

Miss Wingate busied herself with the stamped paper Davies had come to get and then handed it over to him with a languishing smile.

"Who's your friend?" he whispered.

The girl shrugged and sniffed. But she called out:

"Oh, Simp! I'd like to have you meet Mr. Davies, the gentleman from New York."

Simp lowered his feet. He pocketed his knife. He took his tooth-pick from his mouth and examined it

before tossing it away. He got up and came forward with a certain regretfulness.

It was not until then that Davies recognized him.

It was Simp's chin that had got in the way of his elbow the night before at the tavern door.

"Oh, how do you do?" said Mr. Fisher languidly, and he put out a limp hand.

"No hard feelings," said Davies.

The other did not answer. He permitted a vague smile to drift across his features. He retired to his place behind the desk.

The girl made a slight grimace.

"He's enthusiastic like a dead eel," Davies commented softly. He responded to the girl's smile. "Good-by—Tessie!"

"Good-by—Dick!"

"We'll see each other again."

She waved him a plump and shapely palm as he passed through the door.

CHAPTER XXIV

SMALL VOICES

HER smile went with him out into the street. The town was no longer quite what it was before. Something had been added to it—a friendliness, a hue of tenderness. It was something that at once emboldened him and yet softened him. Suppose he went over to the hotel and ate his dinner there, just to show them what sort of a man he was! But a milder inspiration possessed him as he was about to pass a butcher-shop. He went in.

"Give me a couple of pounds of pork-chops," he ordered.

Even the butcher appeared to know who he was. The butcher was all flustered attention. He disappeared into his ice-box. He cut the meat with nervous haste.

"What else?"

"What have you got?"

"Potatoes."

"Sure!"—and he indicated one of the measures that the man held up.

The meat, the potatoes, the butcher himself—all these also had become the notes of a symphony of pink and white. Those were her colors. Tessie's! Her

throat and her nose and her wrists were white. Her lips and her cheeks and her finger-tips were pink. Even her dress had been pink and white.

"What else?"

"What do I need?"

"Maybe some lard."

"All right."

"How much?"

"A couple of pounds."

It was sweet—this preliminary training for the family life. He stowed away the things he had purchased in his now empty suit-case, paid his bill and went out once more into the shady fragrance of the maple-trees.

The noon lull still lasted. The town was still. Overhead was a sky that appeared to be bluer than any sky he had hitherto seen. And there were a few white clouds adrift up there, just like the clouds that Ezra Wood had mentioned—ships to bring dreams in from distant ports, or to carry other dreams away—away into the blue.

In the stillness, a hen in some neighboring back yard fluted her melancholy intention to set; there was a tiny squabble of sparrows in the eaves of the nearest house; there came the faint nasal drone of a woman's voice, singing some old song to the time of a recurrent creak as she rocked her baby to sleep.

Davies stopped where he was and breathed deeply a couple of times, alert yet brooding.

There was a foundation-smell of sun-warmed vegitation, heavy and tepid and sweet; but over this was a fabric of other smells—of new milk, of fried meat, of

fresh earth—which made no less an appeal to his innermost nature.

And then, some lurking thought unfolded itself and was suddenly in full flower.

All this was what he had come to seek. It was a homing instinct that had brought him. There was something in all this that was native to him. He wasn't meant for Chatham Square, for the back room of the Commodore, for the roaring Bowery, for the cell-block or the hospital bed.

No man was.

These were his people—the old colonel and the colonel's niece, and, most of all, Tessie—Tessie Wingate!

He stood there and heard a huckster in some distant part of the village wailing unintelligibly the things that he had for sale; from a bit of woodland beyond a field there came the thud of an ax followed by a rustling crunch of falling branches; a school-bell softly clanged. And these things were music to his ears. At the far end of the street he saw the colonel appear at his gate and peer in his direction, and he knew that the colonel was waiting for him.

"We took the liberty," said the colonel, "of holding dinner for you, Richard."

It may have been a matter of mood, but it seemed to Davies that the colonel was tremulous, glad almost beyond words to see him, as if he had been fearing that the guest might not come at all.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," Davies said. "I stopped to buy a couple of things."

"We thought you'd like to try our boiled greens. It's getting a little late for dandelions, but the poke and the purslane are in their prime."

"Pork chops," Davies announced, indicating his suitcase.

The colonel was a little hard of hearing. "I don't know whether you've ever tried sassafras tea."

"The old grip's full of spuds."

"If you'd like to go to your room, I'll tell Alvah——"

"I ought to see her myself. I'm afraid this lard will run away on me."

"I trust you met no further unpleasantness."

"Me! I met some of the finest people in the world."

He stopped. Either the colonel or Alvah had once more hung the "Room to Let" sign on the door-pull. Davies looked at it. An impulse stirred within him and he obeyed it without pausing to question the meaning of it. He walked up the steps of the stoop. He took the sign from its place. He carefully tore it into four pieces, put the pieces into his pocket.

The colonel was just back of him.

"We thought——" the colonel began.

He was embarrassed under the younger man's glance, although Davies's look was one of friendly assurance.

"You're not going to need that sign any more."

"Richard!"

"I'm here to stay."

From the back of the house came a lilt of music:

"Sail on, sail on, O Ship of State."

He and the colonel entered the wide front door of the mansion side by side, and there, with the door closed behind them, the colonel turned and put his hands on Davies's shoulders.

"Richard," he faltered.

"Cheer up, colonel!"

"What have you done?"

There were tears in the old gentleman's eyes. His jaw sagged a little under his ante-bellum mustache.

"You're not sore, are you, colonel?"

"You are even as Barnabas," said the colonel hoarsely; "Barnabas, the son of consolation."

CHAPTER XXV

FRIEND EMERSON

ALVAH also must have been impressed to some extent, but she had a care about how she showed it. A deepening of the light in her eye, a trace of extra color about her jaw and throat, a certain restriction and stiffness of movement as she took the things from the suitcase—and that was all.

"If you care to wait for about half an hour longer," she said, "I can give you a dinner worth waiting for."

"How about it, Richard?"

"Fine!"

And that was all, for the present; only, before very long, Richard heard the girl singing again. The words came to him, remote, yet distinct, from the kitchen:

> "Sail on, sail on, O Ship of State;
> Sail on, O Union, strong and great.
> Humanity with all its fears,
> With all its hopes of future years,
> Is hanging breathless on thy fate."

The words and music and the voice of the girl combined to strengthen the hitherto unexpressed yearning that was in his heart. He wished he had the power of speech. Not his kind of speech. The colonel's kind. Or her kind—Tessie Wingate's!

He strolled into that room that the colonel had told him was the library, and he saw that a good part of its walls were covered with books. There must have been a thousand of them, two thousand, a dazzling number. What could any one do with such a lot of books as these —especially when they were old, as most of these books appeared to be, with nothing in them, and nobody but a junk-dealer ready to make an offer for them?

The presence of so many books nevertheless stirred his reverence. There was almost something about them that frightened him.

He went over and carefully pulled a volume from its place.

"Emerson's Essays." He opened it. He read: " 'Trust thyself.' "

What followed, confused him; but it didn't greatly matter. It was as if he had asked all this assembled wisdom here, as represented by these stacks of books, the riddle of this new life that was unfolding before him, and that a clear voice had given him answer.

"I'm on, Emerson," he said. " 'Trust thyself!' "

There was a peculiar fascination in this access to wisdom. What wouldn't he know if he could read these books?

Through the silence of his reverie the girl's voice reached him again:

> "Our hearts and hopes, our ways, our tears,
> Our faith triumphant o'er our fears."

With the book still in his hand he turned to find the colonel at the door. The colonel was in his shirt-

sleeves, but he carried a garment over his arm, and this proved to be a coat.

"I wanted to honor the occasion," he said—he was a trifle breathless, apparently as a result of some recent effort and also, possibly, on account of a touch of excitement—"I wanted to honor the occasion by putting this on." And he held the coat up with his two hands in front of him and regarded it with a mingled affection and regret.

It was a handsome coat, with lines of dignity and grace even when thus shown at a disadvantage. The color of it was a dark blue, but it had cuffs and collar of black velvet. The design of it was what may be called a heavy cutaway.

"What the French would call *un frac de cérémonie*," the colonel elucidated.

"Want me to help you on with it?"

"If you would be so kind."

It took something of an effort from the two of them to get the colonel into it. The coat was heavy and it was stiff. Even after the colonel did get it on, the coat adhered to the lines of some nobler mold. The velvet collar reared aloft and back. There was a swanlike line of beauty down the back. The waist of it swept in with a suggestion of slenderness, then swept out again.

"Some coat!"

"It was a perfect fit when I last had it on," the colonel said gently. "It was made for me by certainly the best tailor in Mobile."

He slowly turned, looking down at himself, trying to get a proper idea of how the coat looked on him.

"Swell!" said Davies.

"I wore this when I pleaded my most celebrated case," said the colonel; "my essential line of argument being that while the cardinal principles of justice are immutable, there is, of necessity, a flux in those methods by which that justice is administered."

"Sure; that's right," Davies agreed.

"It had to do with a fine point of constitutional law; my contention being that while assuming a distinctive Federal jurisprudence of paramount authority there should not, however, be such inflexibility of interpretation."

"Sure," said Richard.

"You perceive my attitude."

"The coat looks all right on you at that."

"And then," said the colonel wistfully, as he returned to the original theme, "why, I received word of my brother Abner's death. We had not seen each other for years. He had made little Alvah his sole legatee. She was the only child of a cousin since dead. She is an orphan. But still he had appointed me sole executor. It seemed like a goodly estate at first. But the claims against it were so many—chiefly made by Abner's fellow-townsmen here in St. Clair."

"They seem to have got about all there was."

"Alas! I struggled on—have been struggling on ever since. No sooner were one lot of claims settled than fresh ones came up."

"Enough to drive any one to drink," said Davies.

"I became discouraged, Richard. Be it said to my shame, I did become discouraged. I became careless."

"The coat looks great."

The colonel again made a slight gesture of deprecation. He looked down to the left and to the right. He pulled the tails around and examined them, let them go again. He was thoughtful, reminiscent.

"You see," said the colonel, "I was of a somewhat different presence then—of different habit. Mobile has always been celebrated for its manhood, combining all the strength and romance—and honor, I trust—of the old South."

He finished his inspection and drew himself up. There for a moment he had almost adjusted himself to the original lines of the coat—a fleeting illusion—the illusion of a fine, upstanding gentleman, broad of chest, narrow of hip, proud of carriage, tall, commanding, full of grace.

But the effort was too much.

There he was the shaken old man again—a little too round in the shoulders, a trifle loose about the paunch.

He cast a look of chagrin at his companion. He made a little gesture with his hands, explanatory, regretful, and yet with an air of one who still dares to hope.

"It looks great on you, honest," said Davies. "You know what my old friend, Bill Emerson, says: 'Trust yourself!'"

"Ah, Emerson," the colonel cried, as if he had heard one more echo awakened out of his past. He quoted:

"I am owner of the sphere,
Of the seven stars and the solar year,
Of Cæsar's hand, and Plato's brain,
Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BEATING HEART

For some time now, St. Clair had been experiencing the tremors of a new sort of excitement. First of all, there had been a generous distribution of hand-bills in the front yards of the community announcing the advent of the illustrious Professor Culbertson, of London, England, who would deliver his famous series of lectures on "The Beating Heart." Then there had appeared a two column article in the St. Clair *Weekly Messenger* reciting anecdotes about the great man. The same issue of the paper contained a large display advertisement:

CULBERTSON

(of London, England)

"THE BEATING HEART"

He was a celebrated divine who had traveled extensively in all parts of the world. Presidents and kings had delighted to honor him. He was perhaps one of the most gifted orators America had been permitted to hear since the time of Henry Clay. His vast talents and renown, however, had never won him away

from what he himself was delighted to call "the little deeds of simple kindness." The great cities never ceased to clamor for him; there were a dozen universities, lay and theological, who were bidding against each other to secure him as president. But the two outstanding truths of Culbertson's career were these:

He hated money.

He loved the humble village.

Not that Culbertson regarded St. Clair as a village. In his correspondence with Mayor Jones, the great man referred to St. Clair as a spiritual and intellectual center about which he had heard numerous reports and which he had long desired to visit.

It was with the full approval, therefore, of practically every one in town that Mayor Jones offered to Professor Culbertson the free use of the town hall, evenings, for as long as he should elect to stay.

The great man arrived.

This was Thursday, and his first lecture was not to be delivered until the following evening. He was weary with much travel; but all he wanted was a little rest. He had intended to go to the hotel, and he had listened with kindly patience while a number of the local leaders in social reform, having met him at the depot, explained that the hotel was a den of the demon rum. A number of these leaders had offered him the hospitality of their own homes—Mrs. Meckley, braving the danger of scandalous tongues; the Beverly sisters doing likewise; Mrs. Crane and the deacon, the latter chastened by what had happened at the hotel after Gus had thrown the colonel out.

The great man had surveyed his prospective hosts.

"The hotel needs my influence more than you," he had answered meekly.

It was the colonel who had reported the illustrious one's arrival and what had happened at the station.

"I don't blame him for preferring the hotel," said Alvah, with a casual touch of acid.

"Maybe the demon's a friend of his," Davies suggested.

The colonel smiled, but slowly shook his head.

"Have you seen him, Richard?"

"Not yet. Frank Tine, the insurance agent, has kept me out in the country every day for almost a week, now, looking up prospects for him. Maybe I'll swing in on this line altogether—chuck the soap—although I love the soap. What does Brother Culbertson look like?"

"A great and good man," the colonel answered, with a touch of reverence; "a man grown white in the service. I felt drawn to him even before I learned that we had many friends in common."

"Where?"

"Mobile. He loves the old town—which I myself hold so dear—has been a frequent visitor there."

"How did you get that?"

"He told me—as soon as he found out that I came from there. In fact, I didn't have to tell him. Extraordinary! He saw me standing at a distance on the station platform, and he came right over to me, called me by name. 'Is this not'—I quote him verbatim—'Colonel Evan Williams, formerly of Mobile?' "

"Some one must have piped him off."

"Possibly."

Alvah spoke up:

"I think it would be wonderful if Richard should become a great insurance manager. I somehow prefer it to soap."

But the colonel was not to be diverted.

"A great and a good man," he repeated softly, with his mind still on Professor Culbertson. "I have long been eager to hear a bit of old-fashioned eloquence. St. Clair is singularly destitute of orators. Why, in any town of this size further south, you'll find a Calhoun—or a group of Calhouns—everywhere—I was going to say everywhere they dispense good liquor. But there is no good liquor, of course. It will be a great joy to listen to an orator of his eminence."

"He ought to run for President," said Davies.

"Our country could do worse."

"I never heard of him," said Alvah blankly.

"We must attend his opening lecture," the colonel averred. "It is a long time since I heard a bit of real eloquence."

"I think I'll wait for some night when it isn't so crowded," Alvah opined.

"Richard will go with me. Won't you, Richard?"

The colonel spoke as a man might who had set his feet to a new road and is not yet quite sure of himself. Richard regarded the old man with affection.

"'The Beating Heart' sounds good to me," he declared.

It was evident that there was going to be a crowd,

all right. The lecture was not to begin until eight o'clock; but, from all appearances, St. Clair had supped early, and it was evident that the council chamber, where the lecture was to be given, would be packed long before the slated hour. Culbertson, it seemed, had appealed to the local undertaker to supply extra chairs, and not only the council chamber but the adjoining halls and stairways were likewise destined to house their throngs.

The drift was already running strong by sundown.

"And it looks to me," said Davies, "like we're going to stand unless you've made reservations."

"I dare say we'll find room, Richard," the colonel answered with dignity.

The colonel had on his Mobile coat. He wouldn't have walked fast in it, even if he could have done so. That coat hadn't been made to walk fast in. A stately stroll was its concomitant.

Alvah had taken considerable time to work it well down around the colonel's neck and shoulders at the time they were starting out. That was one reason they were now already a little late. But, as they walked along the street the coat kept on escaping more and more into the mold of its pristine elegance—swelling chest, swanlike back—leaving the colonel of the present day to get along in it the best he could.

"How does it look on me, Richard?"

"Great, Colonel!" Davies replied. "All I'm hoping is that you'll get a good seat."

But in this hope he seemed doomed to disappointment.

The town hall was already so jammed by the time they got there that there wasn't even standing-room on the front steps.

"I bet," said Davies softly, "I could work my way through this mob at that."

There was an invitation in the proposal, but the colonel was dignified. He held to Richard's arm. His disappointment was so obvious and keen, however, that something would have to be done or Davies would never be able to forgive himself. It was coming along toward eight o'clock. In a few minutes the lecture would begin, and then it was certain no interruptions would be permitted on any grounds.

It was at this juncture that Fate came to their aid. Fate wore the not unwelcome guise of Tessie Wingate. She was alone. She appeared to be looking about for some one.

"Hey, Tessie," Richard called.

"Hello, Dickie!"

She dropped a bashful and richly dimpled smile on the colonel's account when she saw that Davies was not alone.

"Say, isn't there a back stairs or something to the old dump?" he inquired with playful seriousness. "I've just got to have a place for the colonel here if I have to knock the house down."

"Why, certainly—since it's you," she answered.

She led them to the back of the building, and there, with a key of her own, she opened an unlighted door. Just inside, there was a narrow stairway running to the council-chamber on the second floor. Through an

open door at the top of the stairs there came a flood of yellow light and the surf-sounds of a crowd.

"The professor just went up this way himself not ten minutes ago," she informed them.

Just then there was a rising splurge of sound as the crowd began to clap its hands. The lecture was about to begin. The colonel had murmured his thanks with nervous haste and was already climbing the stairs.

Davies paused where he was, as Tessie lingered. They looked at each other through the twilight of the dirty little landing where they stood.

"It's me that's got 'The Beating Heart,'" he whispered.

He slipped his arms about her. He flashed his lips to hers.

CHAPTER XXVII

EYE TO EYE

"Brothers and sisters——"

Hidden behind the door of the upper landing there were two campstools, possibly put there by Tessie herself for purposes of her own, and this fed the little flame in Davies's heart as he got them out and opened them.

"It's begun," the colonel whispered tremulously.

A false alarm.

Davies had given the colonel the best place, where the colonel could command a partial view of the speaker's platform. Where Davies sat, he could not see the speaker at all, merely a fringe of the elect who had been invited to places at the speaker's side—Mayor Jones, sallow, sardonic and shifty, playing up by this means to the church element who had been down on him rather for permitting certain doings at the hotel; Mrs. Jones, large-boned, a dressed-up cook but with social ambitions; the Beverly sisters, refined, intellectual, and proprietary, as became the great man's hostesses at dinner this night; Mrs. Meckley, with a touch of extra dressiness, all wormwood and honey.

"We have with us to-night——"

A voice that was deliberate, nasal and high.

"Deacon Crane," whispered the colonel, composing himself to wait but not to listen.

Davies though could scarcely hear anything save the riot in his heart and brain. His eye went out to those on the platform and beyond to the shimmer of lamplit faces that represented a portion of the dense crowd assembled there; yet he saw them not.

"I kissed her on the lips," he told himself. "I didn't intend to do it. You did, you mutt! I did not. And she held her lips to mine."

"Let us, therefore, brothers and sisters——"

The deacon was still at it. The colonel was nodding with his eyes closed, a look of grim patience on his face. A scuffling of feet in the back of the hall. A titter of laughter. A general *sh!*

"She was soft like a pillow," Davies was telling himself. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. She liked it as much as I did. Yeh! Taking advantage of a country girl. You lie. You're the same old crook. But I hope to marry her!"

"—have the honor to interjuce——"

There was a clamorous outburst of applause that lasted a full two minutes. There were strands of applause fringing out even after that, especially from those on the platform—the Beverlys, Mrs. Meckley. And the colonel also was clapping his hands—clapping his hands for Culbertson, of London, England, who had been to Mobile and loved the old town. Davies himself forgot his amorous and ethical meditations for the moment, sought to see the speaker; but he could see nothing but the agitated pool of hands and faces.

"My friends——"

This time, a voice that was sonorous, rich and warm.

"I see a young mother, down there, with a dear little baby in her arms, and they're a leetle bit crowded. Could one of you neighbors sort of move over——"

It was evident that Culbertson had won his crowd. There was another little ripple of hand-clapping, a subdued flutter of sympathy and admiration. Then the speaker's voice was all that could be heard in the otherwise perfect silence:

"Before I go on, I just must say a word about the joy I feel at being in the midst of a gathering such as this. I wasn't feeling very good; like Abraham, an old man and full of years; but I no sooner set my foot on this platform than I got your message—yours, sister, and yours, brother—of sweetness and of strength——"

Davies, only moderately interested, saw the door at the bottom of the narrow stairway open. Even before he could distinguish who the late arrivals were he was pricked to something like tumult by a suppressed giggle and a whispered expostulation.

That was Tessie Wingate down there.

He leaned back, so that he would be in the shadow. He did this in obedience to instinct. He didn't want to embarrass Tessie, and instinct told him that she would be embarrassed if she discovered that he was watching her. The instinct was right most likely. Tessie was not alone. A young man followed her through the door, vaguely tall and handsome but a stranger. Tessie had given a glance up the stairs to-

ward the lighted door at the top. The lower door had been closed at once by the stranger.

"The dirty mutt!"

Davies, despite the shadowy darkness of the lower landing, had seen the stranger down there embracing the girl.

"And oh, let us be tender!"

Culbertson was getting into his stride.

Tessie had fought herself momentarily free.

"She didn't want him to do it," panted Davies to himself.

He sat there with his ears, every now and then, bringing him fragments of the message that Culbertson, the illustrious, was delivering to the good people of St. Clair. But, most of the time, his ears were engrossed with the warring sentiments that were voicing themselves inside his brain. All the time, his eyes were on those two shadowy shapes at the bottom of the dark stairs.

And yet there were lapses in his mental vision, too—times when a third figure, also shadowy, obtruded itself on his thoughts; and this was the apparition of the girl who had taken his arm that night of the battle in the hotel. He saw her cool and straight and brave, felt the touch of her hand, light but strong and reassuring: Alvah Morley.

Culbertson's voice came to him as through a wall, thickly:

"And lo! it is the gift of love that maketh the world go round, precious love that meeteth the needs of our souls. Meat for your hunger, salve for your wounds."

But the jealousy that tormented Davies made him deaf to the lofty strain of the orator.

This also was love—the thing that was biting him now.

He almost wished that he had never left New York. His mind glanced back to the last meeting in the back room of the Commodore. There was the cherubic Solly, the snaky mouthed Phil, tremulous Myrtle. But the blurred picture was dominated most by old Sky-Blue, the bishop. Was the old man right in his mockery of goodness? Or was Ezra Wood right in putting goodness over all?

"Old Ezra Wood was right," declared his heart, and they were like words spoken by a trumpet, could such a thing have been possible.

Said Culbertson:

"Are not angels chiefly female?"

"Yeh, when hounds like you down there keep out," said Davies.

While it was evident, though, that Tessie had done her best to repulse the stranger, she had none the less consented to sit down at his side on one of the lower steps.

"Love. Sweet mystery! Oh, lovely love!"

Only fragments of the lecture were reaching Davies.

"If I had that country jake by the gizzard," he said to himself, "I'd make his eyes pop out."

He had seen the stranger slip his arm about Tessie's waist and leave it there.

There was a warm outbreak of applause from the crowd in the hall. It rose with cumulative force, abun-

dant and well-sustained. The colonel took advantage of the interruption to turn and look at his companion. The colonel was moved. He put a hand on Davies's knee.

"A beautiful sentiment," the colonel whispered.

"It sure was," Davies agreed.

There was no doubt but that Tessie was ill at ease. Davies could tell that from the way she kept turning to glance up the stairs. Still, she was in no position to protect herself, although Davies bitterly wished that she would.

"What do you want her to do?" he asked himself; "make a disturbance with all these people around?—ruin her reputation?"

"The Beating Heart makes little children of us all."

That was the trouble with Tessie. How could you expect a girl like her to have any knowledge of the world? She was as pure and innocent as a chicken just out of the egg—in a world that was filled with hawks and snakes.

"Love between us. Let us all love."

Davies dimly saw the stranger at the bottom of the steps merge his head with Tessie's.

It seemed to Davies a long, long time afterwards that he was awakened from his apathy. Tessie and her stranger-friend had gone some time ago, and after that the world had settled into muffled gloom and silence. So far as he was concerned it had. But there was a final ripping outburst of applause, then a lull, then the voice of Culbertson:

"Come forward and clasp my hand."

After that, the applause was breaking again, and there was a surge of movement.

The colonel turned.

"It was magnificent, Richard."

"It sure was."

"Let us go in and clasp his hand," the colonel proposed.

Davies was willing. Nothing mattered very much. Had the colonel proposed that they jump from a window, Davies would have agreed.

He followed the colonel through the door and on to the platform. The place was swarming. Culbertson, it seemed, had left the platform, however, had descended to the level of the floor where he would be more accessible to the horde.

It was slow business.

They had to form in line and move along inch by inch, with long intervals of waiting. At last, however, the illustrious one was just ahead. Davies couldn't see him yet, but he could hear his warm and sonorous voice:

"God bless you, brother!" "I noticed you, sister."

Had he ever heard that voice before?

He wasn't sure. He didn't give the question much thought. It was hardly a question. He was too much preoccupied with what had happened out there in the stairway—both to himself and to the vaguely handsome unknown.

And then, all of a sudden, so to speak, there he was looking into a pair of keen eyes. The eyes were the

pivotal points of a white cascade of whiskers and hair.

Professor Culbertson!

They recognized each other.

Culbertson was the bishop. Culbertson was old Sky-Blue.

CHAPTER XXVIII

US TWO

CULBERTSON had taken Davies's hand in his own and was holding it.

Their eyes had similarly interlocked, so to speak, Culbertson was smiling—smiling with his brilliant little eyes, principally, for not much of his face was visible through his beard. Davies stared.

Culbertson spoke:

"What did you say your name was?"

"Davies—Richard Davies."

"Oh, my dear young friend!" He was beaming. He glibly lied: "Yes, I got your request. I will speak a word with you in private."

The colonel had turned. He was tremulous with pleasure, proud and delighted.

"He bears a great name, Professor Culbertson. You are doubtless familiar with it."

"Yes! Yes, indeed! The grea-a-a-t Richard Davies!"

"Who translated the Bible into the Cymric."

Culbertson, still holding Davies's hand, was enjoying the situation to the utmost. There was no doubt about that. His smile had extended until it was visible through his beard. He was like Santa Claus before

a particularly good child. The rest of the crowd was jamming up with added smiles for the colonel and the colonel's friend whom the great man so signally honored.

"Well, well, well," droned Santa Claus. "And there is, to be sure, a family resemblance. Tarry here until I have spoken a word to these other dear friends. Don't go away. Here are a couple of chairs right back of me."

Davies and the colonel sat down, with Culbertson right in front of them. They could hear his voice, gentle, mellifluous:

"God bless you, sister."

"Brother Smith! Ah, yes! Brother Smith!"

But all the time a fine observer could have told that he was keeping half an eye on his friends to the rear. Once, the great man turned and glowed at the colonel and asked him if he had had a letter recently from Mobile—it was clear that Sky-Blue suffered from no loss of memory—but the professor's glance, amused and keen, had been for Davies.

"You didn't tell me," whispered the colonel, without resentment.

"What?"

"That you and he had been in communication."

Davies didn't know what to say.

He didn't know what to say, for that matter, even when he and Sky-Blue and the colonel were leaving the place together. The great man had gently, almost affectionately, dismissed the last of his admirers—even the Beverly sisters. He came right out and said

that his dear young friend Richard had expressed a need for him and that he was never too tired to grant such a request. And Davies could see that this was strengthening his own position with the townspeople, and the colonel's as well. But Davies was silent, ill at ease.

The three of them walked slowly down the street together, the colonel and the professor doing most of the talking. For quite a while they were still in the homeward drift from the hall, and Culbertson was still interrupted rather frequently by those who wished to bid him good night, invite him to dinner, inquire into the length of his stay. For all these inquiries he had a gentle and affectionate word.

It struck Davies, though, that even now Sky-Blue was chiefly occupied in getting such information from the colonel as would help to check up any story that Davies himself might tell later on.

"Yes, yes! Descendant of the great Welsh Saint!" Sky-Blue could enjoy a joke as much as any one. He squeezed Davies's arm. "How lovely it would be—how splendid it would be—if he himself should become a minister of the Gospel! When did you say it was that your brother Abner died?"

Davies wasn't listening to what the colonel said.

"As I remember him," said old Sky-Blue, "he was a man of splendid qualities—qualities that endeared him to all who knew him. Did you say that he left considerable property?"

Davies was in something of a panic for a while. It was not a panic of fear in any sense. It was a panic

of resentment. As he looked back on it, this whole night thus far had been a panic of resentment. Sky-Blue's presence was a catastrophe—a plague that had fallen upon him just when it seemed as if he was getting this new life of his well under way.

"Ah, yes!" Sky-Blue was saying, "and his niece was the sole heiress! Alvah Morley! How old did you say Alvah was?"

They lingered for a while at the colonel's front gate, the three of them did; and the great Professor Culbertson there disclosed to the colonel a purpose to tarry in St. Clair for an indefinite period. The goodness of St. Clair had already taken a strong hold on the professor's heart. He was weary. He was like Abraham, an old man and full of years.

"I'm sorry," said the colonel, with a touch of nervousness, "that I can't offer you anything."

Culbertson gave a slight start. He lifted his right hand, palm outward. But he slanted a glance at Davies through the blue darkness, and Davies could see that the old reprobate was smiling through his beard.

"I'll ask your young friend Richard to guide me to my abode," he said weakly. "Good night, colonel."

But scarcely had the colonel gone before Sky-Blue's weakness left him.

"Chick!" he breathed. "Damn my eyes if it ain't Chick!"

"Don't call me that."

"Richard!"

"Yes!"

"Descended from Saint Richard!"

Sky-Blue softly laughed. From his left pocket he extracted what appeared to be a silver spectacle case. He opened this and carefully wadded up a generous chew of fine-cut tobacco which he stowed into the cavern beyond his beard.

"Let's get away from here," Davies said. "They'll hear you."

"Not that way," said Sky-Blue, as Davies started back in the direction of the town. "Ain't there some place where we can sit down together for a while and make ourselves at home?" He forked his beard and spat between his fingers. "I got a quart of the best malt whisky you ever tasted back there in my grip at the hotel," he said; "but as I recollect you don't drink."

"That's right."

"You're a bright one!"

It was the professor who led the way out along the road toward the open country beyond the Flowery Harbor. The professor seemed to be perfectly at home in the country, even at night. When they had gone far enough he cast about for a place where they could sit down. But he was averse to sticking too close to the road.

"You're a bright one, Chick. You can't be too careful in our business."

"What do you mean, 'our business'?"

"Now, there you go."

"You got me wrong. I'm on the level."

"Tell it to Sweeny." The professor was jovial.

After a while they were seated on an overturned wagon-body back of a hay-rick.

"So you got yourself right up to where you're believing it yourself," laughed Sky-Blue softly. "Well, you're right. You're right. That's the only way to make others believe it." He forked his beard and spat between his fingers. "I wish I had a leetle drop of that malt," he ruminated. "It's the best liquor that ever tickled your gullet. When do you reckon you're going to marry the colonel's niece?"

CHAPTER XXIX

STARLIGHT AND GRAFT

"I WASN'T reckonin' anything about it," said Davies, with a hint of asperity.

"O-ho! You wasn't reckonin' *anything* about it! Seems to me you've improved your language a whole lot too. You're a slick one. You always were a slick one. I don't know of a soul I'd rather have met up with. So you're straight?"

"Trying to be."

"Well, then, who's putting up for you?"

"No one."

"You ain't living on air."

"I'm working for a living."

"What line?"

"For a while I was selling soap. Now I'm digging up insurance prospects for a fellow here in town named Tine."

"Frank Tine."

"You've met him?"

"No, but I reckon I will. I hear he is one of these fellows that'd bet his own grandmother on a pair of deuces." Sky-Blue glanced up. "What a beautiful night!"

Davies watched him as he laid his coat aside, took off a shoe.

"You seem to be well posted."

"Middling! Middling! If I thought you really was working for this here Tine, and didn't know that you was a damn-sight slicker'n he was, I'd tell you to look out for him as a second-class crook. Are you and him working together?"

"I tell you I'm on the level," said Davies. "That stuff I was telling you the last time I saw you in New York was straight. I've quit the game. How do you know so much about folks here in St. Clair?"

"Well, since it's you, I bought the sucker-list of old Doc Turnbull who's been selling Indian remedies in this town for the past seven years, and incidentally taking away such odd change as he could pick up in the poker game over at the hotel. Doc didn't need the list any more."

"Dead?"

"Doing time out in South Dakota." He smiled up into the darkness. "What's the nature of this insurance work you say you're doing?"

"I drive around the country with the horse and buggy, find out where there's a good prospect, put Tine next, and he splits the commission with me."

"And Tine hasn't skun you yet?"

"He owes me quite a little."

Sky-Blue laughed.

"Well, anyway," he said, "you ain't losing your time."

"In what way?"

"Well, you're getting a lot of useful information. There's old doc's sucker-list, for example. It ain't what it should be—not in a great many particulars. No sucker-list ever is, until I get through with them. Why, take the case of your old friend, the colonel, for instance."

"Yes; what about him?"

"That's the point. What's he worth?"

"His weight in gold."

"Flapdoodle! How much money has he got?"

"I don't know."

"No, I suppose not! Doc Turnbull's got him down as a sort of original brand of miser with half a million tucked away. I don't want to crab your game, Chicky; but was that what you was after?"

"Of course not."

"I don't want you to misunderstand. I don't think you do, or will. You've seen a little of my work, and you've probably heard about it more. I've retired from active practice, you might say—become what you might call an authority. They've come to count on me—doctors, ministers, lawyers, inventors, publishers. Why, a sucker-list like that of poor old Doc Turnbull is, you might say, nothing but raw material for me. I'll take a list like that, for St. Clair, for example, and by the time I get through with it there won't be an electric institoot, or a college of quacks, or a fake magazine, or a phony charity plant—not in God's own country, nor Canada—no, nor in England, or Sweden—that won't pay me five hundred dollars for it any day—and maybe two or three of them buy-

ing the same list at the same time. But I'm getting old. I'm getting old."

Old Sky-Blue took his sock from his unshod foot. He rested the foot happily on the turf and wriggled his toes. He had removed his hat, and now he lifted his face with its misty white drift of beard and mane. He might have been the prophet David ready to raise his voice in song:

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

"Bishop," said Davies, "honestly, when I heard you spiel to-night, and saw how all the folks fell for you, I was thinking that maybe you were on the square yourself."

"I am on the square."

"Well, then, what are you driving at?"

"I never diddled the law in my life," said Sky-Blue, still in a sort of ecstasy as he contemplated the night. "Making folks feel good! That's my line. And if that ain't being on the square, why, I'd like to know what you call it, Chicky. And that's why I'm going to offer you the biggest chance any boy ever had. I'm going to make a man out of you. I'm going to treat you like a son—make you rich—make you famous——"

"I'm much obliged, but——"

"Wait a minute. I ain't through yet. When I saw you in the town hall to-night, you all alone, and fresh and innocent right off the Bowery, and trying to work this town all by yourself, why, my heart just cried for you. It did. It was all I could do to keep from

bursting out right in front of all those tin-horn hypocrites and slobbering old hens and taking you to my bosom."

"Well, I was surprised to see you too."

"Listen, Chicky," and the bishop came back to earth and dropped his voice. "I'm going to show you how much I think of you. You're right. Never go in for this hanky-panky, mealy-mouthed, psalm-singing line of pious graft unless you've got the gall to put it over even on your friends. Me, I'm gettin' a leetle old—a leetle slack. I like my comforts—my chaw of tobaccer, my occasional bend. You—you're different. Here you are, sittin' here now, solemn as a sexton, lettin' on even to old Sky-Blue that you're straight."

"I am."

"Right enough! Now, what I'm drivin' at is this: I expect the sucker-list for this town, as annotated and brought up to date, will be worth one thousand bucks at least. I can get almost that much from a new spirit-photo concern alone. Then, if I decide to do so—as I think maybe I will—and stay around here like it was my headquarters for maybe two or three months or so—I ought to be able to stick the good people for three or four thousand more on behalf of the Beating Heart Seminary which I'm expectin' to found in Wichita."

"What's the answer?"

"The answer's this, Rollo: Grandpa's goin' to let you in on the graft."

"I think I'd better be getting back to the house,"

said Davies. "I'm afraid the folks will be sitting up for me."

"Well, well, well!" purred the bishop.

He proceeded to pull on his sock and his shoes, while Davies waited for him. Sky-Blue was talking to himself. And it sounded gentle and ironical and disquieting to Davies, although he couldn't catch much of what the bishop said—not even when the elder had taken him by the arm and started back with him in the direction from which they had come.

Davies was silent. He was oppressed by a sense of foreboding. This became acute as he saw that the colonel had waited for him—that the colonel and Alvah were both sitting on the stoop.

"Is that the niece?" Sky-Blue whispered.

"Yes."

"Well, well, well," the bishop droned.

CHAPTER XXX

HIGH PRAISE

"I've just been having a talk with our dear boy Richard," the bishop was saying, a little later; and he slipped his arm around Davies's shoulder and patted him with paternal affection.

"Well, we think a lot of Richard," the colonel averred.

It was easy to see that the colonel was as moved as if the great man had praised an actual son of the house. At the sight of Professor Culbertson and Davies returning from their walk the colonel had hurried down to the gate. He was now followed, somewhat timidly, by Alvah. Old Sky-Blue had an eye for the girl as she approached through the blue transparency of the night. All girls may appear beautiful seen through such a veil.

With his hands still patting Davies on the shoulder, Sky-Blue spoke again:

"And this is the dear niece! Yes, yes! Richard has spoken to me about her."

"You're a liar," stormed Davies in his heart, but he made no sound.

Alvah came forward with her eyes on the great man, but she had shot one glance in Richard's direction.

What could Richard have been saying about her? She acknowledged her uncle's introduction. She put out her hand, and Sky-Blue took it. He not only took it; he held on to it. He not only held on to it; he gently patted it.

"Dear child!"

"Uncle has spoken about you," she faltered; and it seemed to Davies that he could see her flush with embarrassment.

"Dear child!"

"Ah, let go her hand," said Davies in his heart.

"Spoken about you very enthusiastically," Alvah completed what she had started out to say.

"And wasn't you there yourself?" the bishop asked her, with gentle reproof.

"No."

"You should have come with Richard. Richard would have brought you. Wouldn't you, Richard?"

And he finally released his hold on Alvah to embrace dear Richard again. Richard was silent.

"There is nothing," said the colonel, "nothing!—that we could ask Richard to do that he wouldn't do." The colonel was speaking with genuine emotion. "Won't you come in and sit down for a while? It is still early."

Davies's heart sank. He heard Sky-Blue saying something about the sweet influences of affection and family life. He distrusted the bishop savagely, and never so much as at this present moment.

"Our home is humble," the colonel apologized.

"Love maketh marble halls," Sky-Blue intoned. He

was through the gate and had taken Alvah's arm for support.

Even so, Davies, from the rear, could see that the bearded elder was alert to all that he saw, was only too glad to make a closer acquaintance with the house. Sky-Blue was deftly supplementing the questions he had already asked the colonel concerning the ownership of the property, Alvah answering him with simple frankness.

"So all this will be yours, some day?"

"If there's anything left of it."

"Well, well, well! And St. Clair is growing."

"Three new families in the last month. And there's Mr. Davies."

"Yes, yes! There's Mr. Davies."

Alvah ran into the dark house and brought out a cushion for the great man, and Professor Culbertson settled down on this as if he intended to remain the rest of the night. Perhaps this was his intention.

"I was just telling Richard, but a moment ago," he related, "what a jewel of a blessing had been conferred upon him—merited! merited!—to be thus adopted into a home circle like that of Colonel Evan Williams."

"Now! Now!" the colonel protested modestly.

"One of the proudest names of the South! 'Why,' I says to him, 'you may well be descended from a saint —as you are,' I says to him; 'but where would even a saint be,' I says to him, 'if your saint had to live in the tainted atmosphere'—I believe that's the phrase I used. Ain't it, Richard? Well, never mind. 'If

your saint had to live,' I says to him, 'in the pestiferous—yea, and insectiferous'—I believe in a little modest merriment—'hotel I'm in instead of this noble 'n godly home?' "

"You're very——" the colonel began.

"And Richard—God bless the boy!—he speaks right up, and he says to me, 'Dr. Culbertson'—manly like, inspired to the grea-a-a-t lesson of service and loving kindness; 'Dr. Culbertson,' he says, 'won't you please to take my room?' he says. 'Here in this house,' he says; 'even if I have to sleep on the door-mat,' he says; 'like your faithful servant—yea, verily, like unto a faithful servant of the Beating Heart—which I am,' he says. And oh-h-h, brother!—oh-h-h, sister!—when I heard these words—issue from the wa-a-rm and vi-berant soul of him who spake them, I knew that my mission to this town was blessed, especially with a dear good home like this."

"Why, I hardly dare——" the colonel began.

"I told Richard I would accept."

"You didn't——" Davies tried to speak.

"—a great honor," the colonel was saying. "But for one who has been entertained by royalty——"

"None more royal!" shouted old Sky-Blue with authority. "None more royal than Colonel Evan Williams!" And he brought his heel down hard on Davies's toes in the dark of the stoop. "My beloved Richard," he said, with a shaking voice, "I wish you'd step around to the hotel and have them send my things around."

"But it's too late," Davies gritted.

"Oh, just my grip will do. Not a word, colonel! Anything that's good enough for you, and for your dear niece—Alvah?—is that not her name?—yes, I recollect it now; so Richard called her—and a dear, beautiful name it is! What was I saying? Oh, yes! And Richard! Richard!"

"What?"

"Peradventure, you can find some good soul to aid you with the trunk. And should the hotel people—they're good, hearty folks, but simple—demand their due, let them have it! Let them have it! Give them whatever they ask. Trust begetteth trust. That has been my motto for fifty year. Yes, I think that you had better get all my things around—get them around to-night."

"How much is that bill going to be—about?" Davies inquired.

But apparently no one heard his question except Alvah, and she gave him an appealing look through the gloaming that sent him, troubled, on the errand to the hotel.

He had gone possibly only half a hundred yards up the street, however, when he heard a light rush as of some winged thing back of him. And there was Alvah coming to join him.

CHAPTER XXXI

COMPENSATIONS

SOMETHING in the way he turned to meet her made her hesitate while she was still several feet away from him.

"What do you want?" he asked.

He was still under the domination of the ire old Sky-Blue had put into him.

"Professor Culbertson," she faltered, "he thought that I'd better go with you. I mentioned—that you weren't on the best of terms—with the people at the hotel."

Davies was silent. He was swallowing his resentment, but he was finding it hard to get it down.

"That's all right," he said brokenly.

Alvah, reassured, came close. The expression in her face was one of such bright innocence that he was in despair of a method by which he could properly express himself—express his anger, his anxiety.

"Isn't he wonderful?" Alvah said.

"Who?"

"Professor Culbertson."

Silence.

"And he thinks you are so wonderful."

"Uhuh!"

They walked along for a space with the silent path under their feet and the damp and fragrant darkness pushing them closer together.

"What's the matter?" Alvah queried. Her voice was small.

"Nothing."

"Don't you want me to come with you?"

"Sure; that's all right."

She must have been encouraged. A gossamer weight came out of the darkness and rested on his arm—like a bird on a branch—and that was her hand. The touch of it recalled poignantly to Davies that first night of his in St. Clair. He felt somewhat as if a jagged hole had been shot through the fabric of this new life he had been spinning. Was this the hand of a mender? He felt as if it might be. What was that thing old Bill Emerson had to say about compensations?

Alvah's voice was still smaller when she spoke again:

"Don't be blue."

Said Davies: "Say, if any of those Indians around at the hotel get fresh with me to-night, I'll just about butcher the whole bunch."

"Professor Culbertson must have known," she replied. "That was why he sent me. I'm glad he did —and I'm glad I came—even if you didn't want me to —on your account. He loves you. He loves you as much as Uncle Evan does. Isn't the path dark!"

Davies meditated: This wasn't the only path that was dark.

"When you're in a dark place like this," said Alvah,

"and you can't see where you are putting your feet, do you know what to do?"

"No."

"Don't try to see the ground at all. Just look up and you'll see an opening between the trees. See?"

"Yes."

"And your feet will unconsciously keep the path."

The girl was right. Looking up, Davies could see an irregular rift of starry sky between the overhanging blackness of the maple-trees. He marveled a little at her country-craft. With his face turned upward his feet went forward without uncertainty, kept to the proper path. Some voice inside of him insistently repeated:

"*When you're in the dark look up.*"

It was only gradually that the purport of the message penetrated to his outer consciousness.

"You're right," he said; and there was no longer any hardness in his voice.

Instantly—although she herself might not have been aware of it—Alvah responded to his softened mood. She said that she loved the night—loved the stars—loved the smell of the sleeping flowers—loved the whispering trees—loved dear old Professor Culbertson.

What could Davies say? Nothing! Worse than nothing.

"Don't you?" she thrilled.

"What?"

"Just love dear old Professor Culbertson."

"Sure."

"What did you tell him about me?"

"Oh, I just said that you were a nice girl."

"And what did he say?"

"Well, you see he had to take my word for it."

There was a long pause, then Alvah spoke with some slight vibrancy of an almost sacred enthusiasm.

"I think he will have a wonderful influence on uncle —as you have had. Oh, I'm so grateful! It was so hard for uncle when he was deprived of all association with his equals."

"I'm not his equal."

Her only immediate answer was to look up at him —a glance which he felt rather than saw; and the feeling of it was a tiny flood of warmth which began at his jaw and trickled down over his shoulder and penetrated to his heart. Without premeditation he reached over and touched the hand on his arm.

"You're the equal of any man in the world," she retorted stoutly, with perfect conviction.

It was a detached judgment, abstruse, impersonal.

"I'll tell you this," he responded. "You're the equal —and you're more than the equal—of any *girl* in the world. You're all to the good. If it wasn't for you, and girls like you, we'd all be on the blink, and this country certainly would be on the blink."

Alvah meditated this declaration—did this reverently, as any one could have told by her voice when she spoke again.

"Oh, I should be so glad if what you say were so."

"It is so."

"I mean about being of some use in the world—of some use to America. And that's the world; isn't it?

—the world of so many thousands and hundreds of thousands who've never had a chance yet to live here—but look forward to it almost like those of us who *are* here look forward to heaven. I think it's wonderful to be an American. Don't you? And, just think!—we're America—you and I—and Uncle Evan—and dear Professor Culbertson, even if he does come from London, England! When you think of it, doesn't it just make you want to be great and noble, and generous and brave?"

"I never thought of it," Davies murmured.

"Oh, I wish——"

But it expanded so—whatever it was that Alvah wished—expanded so that it escaped the confinement of words—became a breath that was of the essence of the night—infinite, limpid, fragrant and pure. And it was just as if a breath of wind had filled the sails of a spirit ship in which Davies suddenly found himself—a buoyant spirit bark that rose with him out and up from the nether darkness.

CHAPTER XXXII

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

DAVIES sat in his room that night after his return from the hotel and gave himself over to thought. He did some of the hardest thinking in his whole career.

"To be, or not to be?" as the colonel said.

Was it all worth while? In the vernacular that still served him in much of his private reflection: Should he blow the game, or should he stick it out?

The house had long been quiet.

The colonel, with genuine, old-fashioned hospitality, had put the illustrious Culbertson to bed in his own chamber and had sought quarters for himself elsewhere. The colonel gone, Davies had lingered to see old Sky-Blue feverishly unstrap his biggest grip and take from it that quart of pure malt he had mentioned. But he had merely glanced at this, shaken his head fondly.

"You're still there," he had said, addressing the bottle; "but you'll have to wait!"

And he hid the bottle more carefully than it had been hidden.

"The bill was six-ninety," Davies had said.

"What bill?"

"The hotel bill."

"And you paid it?"

"Sure I paid it—to get your baggage."

Old Sky-Blue had tried to squirm out of it, defer discussion until the morning. He was tired. He was an old man. And, finally, he had got peevish, lost his temper. Anyway, he hadn't paid.

Davies asked himself: Was it fair? Was it?—that this old specter should thus come out of the past to haunt him and blackmail him?

That past!

With a little wave of despair Davies saw again, with the eyes of his soul, that supreme picture of the colonel and the colonel's niece at the foot of the stairs when they had knelt there and thanked the Almighty for having sent him, Davies, as some sort of an angelic messenger.

Absurd, of course! But the absurdity of it was a beautiful thing that Davies knew now he had been nursing in his heart.

With tragic comprehension, he saw that he had been aspiring to become some such creature as the colonel and Alvah had believed him to be. A difficult rôle! One that had caused him to discipline himself—heart and brain, eye and tongue—as he had never disciplined himself before. And he had believed that he might succeed.

He blew out his light. He went over and sat on the sill of the open window. The perfume of the dark garden went up like invisible incense. The branches of the trees pointed upward.

"*When you are in the dark, look up.*"

"Alvah," he whispered.

She was everything that Sky-Blue was not. He pictured the two of them—physically, mentally, spiritually; and he saw them reduced to terms of power expressible in two possible careers that lay ahead of him:

Sky-Blue, with his offer of partnership—easy money—no risk—nothing rough! Why not? Hadn't Sky-Blue lived almost a hundred years? Hadn't he kept out of jail? Traveled wherever he wanted to? Had a good time? Wasn't he honored by all who knew him, crooks and suckers alike? Wasn't it the bishop's specialty to make folks feel good? And what was there so crooked about that? Anyway, what was there to gain by sticking to the country? What had life here in St. Clair done for the colonel, Deacon Crane, Simp Fisher, Tessie Wingate?

Then Alvah—somehow the incarnation of a patriotic song!—that was Alvah!—part hymn, part chant of victory!—of victory after battle! She was America—an America that was clean and vigorous and daring—an America of drums and fluttering banners! So would his America be if he followed her, though he followed her only in the spirit. And wasn't this something better than easy money? Wasn't it better to fight the fair fight—and let the best man win—than to get the prize through a fake or a foul?

Old Sky-Blue was on one side of him. Alvah Morley was on the other. They were like contending spirits—one the black and blood-red devil's advocate; the other, a winged seraph.

And he walked between them.

Where was Tessie Wingate in this drama of his life?

Nowhere. So much for her. She didn't count at all.

He saw it now. The whole sum and substance of his life was reduced to a single choice, and this choice was not as one between Alvah and some other girl. It was a choice between Alvah and Sky-Blue. To put it otherwise: It was a choice between such nights as this one —cool, sweet, majestic, silent, and grand; and such other nights as he had known back there in New York.

Now that he thought of it, most of his preceding life had been but a series of nights—nights in the squalor and thunder of lower Manhattan; summer and winter nights, differentiated mostly in the quality of human wretchedness, violence, and vice; nights in the fighting-clubs, heavy with smoke and the effluvia of unwashed mobs; nights in the billiard-parlors, the dance-halls, and the back rooms of saloons; nights in the blaring and blatant open of streets and squares, filled with peril and murderous brutalities, with serpent cunning and tigerish greed.

It all brought back to him that night of his interview with Ezra Wood, and he was seeing the old farmer again, not as some one who had been bewildered and helpless, but some one who was as a white and shining giant with power to shape the destinies of men—some one who was seated up there now, looking down upon him as he walked and wavered with the devil's advocate on one side of him and the seraph on the other.

Could there be any doubt as to the one to which he would cast his choice?

But although it is given to every man, now and then, as it was given to Richard Davies this night, to

go up in the observation-plane of the spirit, so to speak, to get a bird's-eye view of the various roads that lay ahead, it is difficult to retain this clarity of vision when the flier comes back to earth.

So Davies found it.

Sitting there on his window-sill, the problem had become just that: Which—Sky-Blue or Alvah?

And no later than the following morning, here was old Sky-Blue himself, apparently urging him to the side of the angels. Sky-Blue had followed Davies to the gate where they could talk together a bit in private out of hearing of Alvah and the colonel. The bishop had been all honey and butter during breakfast, especially when addressing Davies. And the elder still had his arm about the youth now, when they came to the gate.

There the bishop breathed a terrible oath.

"Why don't you smile at me?" he demanded; "show a little affection—play the game? Damn me if I ever saw such an ungrateful purp! How long do you think I can go on stallin' about you lovin' me and me lovin' you and all the rest of the bunk if you don't play up to me?"

"I'm not playing a game," Davies whispered fiercely.

"Never mind the gas," the bishop adjured.

"If you were a younger man," said Davies, "I'd soak you one."

"Oh, you would!"

And the bishop patted him on the shoulder for the benefit of those who might be looking.

"Maybe I will, anyway," said Davies, as his muscles contracted.

"You've got a lot to learn," said Sky-Blue patiently, looking up at the morning. "You've got a lot to learn. Sing Sing, Joliet, Danemora, San Quentin—they're full of boys that were just a leetle like you."

"You ain't got nothin' on me."

"No, no!"

"Then what you beefin' about?"

"I was merely thinkin' how nice it would be if I invited Solly and Phil to come and join us, out here. The colonel's got plenty of room. And there's Billy Gin. You and him worked together. I understand they've turned him out of Matteawan as cured, although I dare say he also needs a breath of country air."

The morning was one of matchless beauty, of soft sounds and sparkling fragrance. Solly, Phil, Billy Gin! The back room of the Commodore! A padded cell in the great hospital-prison for the criminal insane! And the morning had become permeated with a taint of deadly poison.

"To hell with you!"

Davies's voice was soft, but it was swift and grim.

"Chicky!"

The bishop's voice quavered, indicating a change of heart.

"Don't call me that."

"Richard!"

"What? Talk quick. I got to be beating it. I've got my work to do."

"I'm an old man," said the bishop, with a manifest effort to speak righteously. "I've been drawn to you

as I was never drawn to any one. I'm all alone in the world."

"Go on."

"At this moment I have nothing in my heart but admiration and affection for you. As God is my witness, my boy, I want you to be happy, I want you to succeed. I'm not long for this world. I'll have enough to answer for, when I stand up there in front of the Judgment Seat, and they call my name, and I answer, 'Here,' and the angels are singin' sweet and low."

Davies shot a side glance at the bishop. He wasn't surprised at what he saw. The old man was still looking up. There were tears in his eyes.

"Well, what are you cryin' about?" Davies inquired. "You started the rough stuff."

"It's your ingratitude," Sky-Blue answered with an effort.

"Where do you get that?"

"Just when I've been smoothin' everything for your weddin'."

"My what?"

"Your weddin', Richard. Why, I've got little Alvah crazy about you, when you might have been stallin' around till you was as gray as I am. I was talkin' to her again this morning while you was still asleep."

"For the love of——"

"Yes, yes. I know what you would say. You didn't know about the colonel having that snug little fortune tucked away. You've already told me all about that. You didn't know that the colonel was apt to croak before long and leave all he's got to the little maid.

Pretty soft! Pretty soft for you, Richard! But why do you try to crab my game when I ain't crabbin' yours—when I'm doin' all I can to push your game along? Ain't we friends? Ain't it right that we should love each other?"

Davies took thought.

This was no time for recrimination; no time for an emotional outbreak of any kind.

He spoke calmly:

"The colonel hasn't got a sou-marquee to his name."

"Are you sure of that?" Sky-Blue demanded with equal calm.

"Absolutely."

"Then," said Sky-Blue, with a touch of bewilderment, "what are you playin' up to him so for?"

Before Davies could answer this perfectly natural question, Alvah came skipping down the path from the house. She merely wanted to ask whether or not Dick would be home for dinner; and he told her that he would not—that he would be out in the country all day.

But there they stood, side by side, just as he had visioned them the night before—old Sky-Blue and Alvah—the devil's advocate and the seraph—and the devil's advocate had been urging him to take the seraph for a bride.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ALVAH LISTENS

They lingered for a while at the gate, the girl and the illustrious Professor Culbertson, as Davies went off down the verdant street.

"A fine young man," breathed the professor. He turned and looked at Alvah. He solemnly repeated his judgment: "A fine young man. But headstrong! But headstrong! Do you know what's been ailing him to make him act so sort of sullen with me?"

"I hadn't noticed it," replied Alvah brightly.

"I have, and it's hurt me. But he'll get over it, dear boy; and it will merely increase that bond of love which unites us so strongly already. Headstrong! But lovable!"

"What was it?"

"It was this," Sky-Blue answered, ready to testify to the whole truth and all the details thereof. "As you probably know, I am aimin' to crown my life's work by foundin' the Beating Heart Seminary—out in Wichita—where my dear sister resides—a wonderful woman, and a godly—and the inspiration of my life. Oh-h-h, how she has sustained me when some dear one was ungrateful! But that is the penalty of good deeds, my child. Ingratitude! I am old. I am poor. But there!"

Sky-Blue used his handkerchief.

"You were telling me about Richard," Alvah shyly reminded him.

"Well, I was tellin' him what I am tellin' you. I mentioned the Beating Heart Seminary. I mentioned it as the dream of my declinin' days. I mentioned that I intended to give ten or a dozen lectures here in this dear community—free gratis and without price—and then if the good souls wanted to give somethin' toward the Beating Heart Seminary—you've heard about it, read about it in the public prints. No? Well, you're young. I can remedy that."

"Hadn't he heard about it either?"

"Who?"

She colored slightly under Sky-Blue's twinkling gaze.

"Richard."

"Well, I'll tell you, just as I was tellin' him. Lawyers, doctors, ministers, bankers—they've all been a waitin' and a prayin' for me to speak the word. But I've refused to speak the word. They've come to me with their love-offerings, and their fees, and their collections, and their bank-books, and have cast these at my feet. Oh-h-h, the response! But I'd say: 'No! Take back your money! Give it to the institoots and colleges that depend on such as you! The Beating Heart,' I'd say 'will be a monument to them as have been denied these grea-a-t channels of eely-mo-sinary outpourin'. No, no! Take back your money!' "

"And what did Richard say to that?"

"Well, I was sayin' to him how I was confinin' donations to such dear souls as we have here in St. Clair—to

you, sweet child, and peradventure to your uncle—and Richard speaks up, manly like, and he says, says he: 'Professor Culbertson, I want to do my share.' I just looked at him, and he kind of blushed. 'Fifty dollars,' he says. 'What for?' I asked. He wriggles. 'Put it down in her name,' he says. 'Whose name?' He looks away. And whose name do you suppose he whispered?"

Sky-Blue reached out and gently tweaked Alvah's ear.

"Maybe he didn't want you to tell me this," said Alvah, slightly stifled.

"He didn't, but I told him that I would," Sky-Blue announced benevolently. He chuckled to himself. "That's what got him peeved. You see, he thinks that your uncle is poor!"

"There's Uncle Evan now," said Alvah breathlessly, and she skipped away.

"I thought so! I thought so!" Sky-Blue communed acutely with himself, after she was gone. "When it comes to gettin' a line on the old man's money, she stalls just like Chick did."

He waved a fraternal hand to Colonel Williams who had just come around the corner of the house. The colonel was going to the post-office, and was possibly hoping to make the trip accompanied by his eminent guest. The colonel had on his Mobile coat. There was a certain suggestion of wealth and well-being about him. There was no denying it.

"He's rich, all right," Sky-Blue muttered complacently.

But Alvah was speeding up the path like a bird. She

kissed her uncle lightly on the cheek as she passed him. She disappeared into the house. There she came to a fluttering halt, in the dusky hall.

She was loved. Richard loved her.

She loved. She loved Richard.

And the formula of her life, of the world, and of God and his angels, was reduced to this—no, expanded into this.

Oh, what if he should tell her so, and what if she should tell him so! Would it ever come to that? Would there ever be—could there ever be—in this life such a degree of delicious intimacy between them that they could speak to each other freely of this sacred theme?

Oh, Richard! Oh, dear Uncle Evan, who had brought Richard into her life! Oh, dear, dear Professor Culbertson who had revealed to her this majestic advent!

She went up the stairs to her room on the second floor. The furniture in it was sparse and decrepit, but faintly pretty, rather touching, covered with chintz. There was a good mirror though. She went to it. She looked at her reflection as at the reflection of some one she had never seen before.

There must have been some sort of a transformation —a hint of transfiguration. Mounting color, eyes of a depth and a brightness, lips that were parted and pink—yet all this contributory to an expression that was a balance of joy and pain.

And joy and pain were what she felt.

She couldn't understand it at all. Why should her heart have ached when all creation was a swirl of gladness?

Perhaps her hair was drawn back a bit too severely from her forehead. Her forehead was a little too high anyway. She loosened her hair. She fluffed it forward. Atrocious! She tried it again. That was better. A wave to one side.

To have seen her, one would have been justified in the belief that she had been engaged in labors like this for years.

While she was leaning forward, without the slightest premonition of what was to follow, she discovered that there was a tear in her eye. She smiled at it. She brushed it away. But there was another to take its place.

Suddenly, there was no holding them back at all, those tears; and the aching in her heart had mounted to her throat. And she fairly tottered to her little chintz-covered bed and threw herself upon it, curled up and face down, and wishing that she could die like that before the world could show itself to be something less killingly glad.

It may have been half an hour later when she heard her uncle and his illustrious guest return from their stroll to the post-office. They established themselves on the front stoop, chatting with the dignified confraternity of their age and sex.

She ran down to the library and looked out at them.

Then she saw Mrs. Meckley come across the street, fond but embarrassed. And Mrs. Meckley was bearing a covered dish. She skittered up the path.

"I thought you'd like to taste my custard!" cried Mrs. Meckley.

Wasn't the whole world changed? Wasn't the whole world better for the presence of dear old Professor Culbertson?

Alvah went out, and Mrs. Meckley smiled at her as Alvah took the dish. Sky-Blue had moved over and invited the sister to sit down, and Sister Meckley was in a tremor of happiness.

"I can only stay a moment," she said, very agitated.

And Mrs. Meckley hadn't visited them for years. And Mrs. Meckley hadn't been there fifteen minutes before Judge Berry's aristocratic wife drove up in her four-seated phaëton to invite the colonel and the professor for a ride.

Wasn't everything just wonderful?

CHAPTER XXXIV

INTO THE DEPTHS

But Davies himself went away from the colonel's Flowery Harbor with a peculiar conflict of joy and grief going on inside of him—a sort of laboring aspiration, as if his spirit were a pigeon with a pebble tied to its foot. There was a parallel to this in the very atmosphere—stainless and sparkling as to its physical aspect, yet shot through with that taint of poison old Sky-Blue, like a wicked alchemist, had put there.

He tried to doctor himself, doctor the atmosphere—tried to free his spiritual pigeon from the weight that held it down. He tried to do this with argument.

Was there anything in the world to cause him distress? Was there? Wasn't his New York record clean so far as the law was concerned? Wasn't Sky-Blue merely bluffing in his talk about Sing Sing and other prisons? Wouldn't the ancient crook have as much to fear as any one from an incursion of Solly and Phil and their like?

And he himself, Richard Davies, wasn't he living strictly on the level? Wasn't he beginning to make both money and reputation for himself? Wasn't he keeping himself as clean as the soap which he continued to sell? And wasn't his new line of insurance work

causing him to meet all manner of good people? Weren't they accepting him more and more as one of themselves and teaching him betimes their manners, their speech, and their habits of thought?

He could render a satisfactory answer to all these questions—could do this with certainty and without equivocation.

But his trouble remained.

Something happened that made it worse.

He hadn't gone very far before he saw his old friend, Constable Winch, lounging about a corner, and the constable had the appearance of waiting for him. The constable grinned at Davies, but back of the grin there was a lurking something that Davies didn't like; and, there for a moment or two, Davies caught a miasmic gust of disquiet that was almost fear. Had the bishop been dropping remarks elsewhere? Had the constable been hearing things?

"Hello!" drawled Winch.

"Hello! How are you?"

"Fair to middling. Understand Professor Culbertson's stoppin' down to your place?"

"Yes."

"Friend of yours?"

Davies reflected. Maybe the constable had heard something about the bishop. The reflection didn't take very long. Well, if that were the case, he wasn't going to desert the old man.

"Yes, he's a friend of mine," he replied.

The constable delivered himself of a slight snort of satisfaction. So much was settled. He was now ready

to proceed to the next stage of the campaign he had in mind. He drawled the preliminary bombardment in a high nasal.

"I was wonderin' if you couldn't lend me a five-spot?"

"Lend you five dollars?"

"That's about the size of it."

"What the matter—they been holding up your pay?"

The constable didn't answer immediately.

It may have been just imagination, but it struck Davies that the thing lurking behind the surface of the constable's mien and speech became definitely a menace —at least a threat.

"No, I can't say that they been holdin' up my pay," he answered. "I was a little short. Thought you might oblige me."

"I'm short myself," said Davies.

"Thought maybe you wouldn't want me to talk to Professor Culbertson. Understand he's got a high opinion of you. Like all of us! Like all of us!"

"Talk to him about what?"

The constable disguised his real meaning with an artificial laugh. He was keeping his eyes averted.

"About your sellin' soap without a license and then sneakin' my badge. But shucks! I don't give a dern. Only, since we was friends and, as the old sayin' says, one good turn deserves another."

"I can let you have a two," said Davies.

He wanted to be alone with his thoughts. That pebble on the pigeon's foot had become a rock. The constable had slipped immediately into a state of stable equipoise. He was at peace. His eyes were alert and

eager as he kept them on Davies's pocket-hand. Davies passed over the money.

"You ought to be in a larger town," said Davies coolly. "You're wasting your talents on a little place like this."

"Why, yes," said Winch. "One of these automobile fellers told me the same thing no later'n yesterday." He took a second thought. "Say," he demanded, "you wasn't intendin' no double meanin' in that remark of yours, was you?"

"No."

"Wasn't meanin' that I was like some of these here slick New York constables you hear about?"

"Not on your life!"

"Because," said Winch, "I just heard somethin' concernin' you—thought maybe you'd like to hear."

"What was it?"

"I ain't sure I got a legal right to tell."

"Something connected with the law?"

"Not yet," said the constable with a side-long glance of his sly and bright little eyes. "Not yet, but it's goin' to be."

Davies mentally held his breath. He was in a mood to believe almost anything. And yet, even then his curiosity was not centered so much on what the constable might be driving at as to the proper answer of that question which had obsessed him more or less ever since his arrival in St. Clair: Should he go, or should he remain? Should he run, or should he fight?

Anyway, the alternative of a quick disappearance

from St. Clair encouraged him to express some of the bitterness, at least, that was in his heart.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "What in the——"

He paused, but his flash was so savage that the constable was at once intent to mollify him.

"Simp Fisher," he whispered, "he's goin' to sue you."

"What for?"

"Criminal damages."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Why, Simp's been havin' tooth trouble ever since you h'isted him one in the jaw, and now he's got a lawyer—maybe you've see him—handsome young fellow who's runnin' around with Tessie Wingate. You see, Simp was sort of jealous of the lawyer, I guess—been aimin' to win Tessie for himself—Simp's got a rich uncle over near Dartown—stands to come in for a right smart lot of money some day—so Tessie to sort of bring the lawyer—Peebles—that's his name—Harold Peebles—to sort of bring Peebles and Simp together and keep everything smooth and pleasant got Simp to give Harold this case—and Harold, he says he's goin' to press it because—it ain't none of my business, you understand, and I'm just tellin' you this out of pure friendship you might say—because some one told Harold that they saw you kiss Tessie Wingate at the bottom of the steps over there in the town hall."

"I'll paste Harold one, too," Davies announced with decision.

The constable laughed.

"Better not," he said. "They're tricky—these lawyers. Why, they wouldn't give a dern if you did smack

their chops if they thought they could get a case against ye. No sense of pride. No sense of honor."

It was Davies's turn to laugh. He laughed bitterly.

Wasn't the whole world pretty small and contemptible? Why should a fellow try to make himself any different?

He gave his mood free rein.

The scales had fallen from his eyes, and he was seeing the truth—seeing it naked and ugly—a grinning skeleton disinterred from all earthly experience. The earth was a graveyard. He saw it now. It was a graveyard in which he himself had buried deeds, and thoughts, and dreams. And now these were rising up to squeak and gibber.

A fellow was an idiot to fight against a phantom host like that.

He had no heart at all, either for his soap or his insurance. Instead of going to the livery stable, therefore, he ambled out into the country on foot, not caring very much where he went—just so long as he could be by himself, away from the curse of human society.

But his bad luck followed him.

Along toward noon, when he was feeling hungry and when, also, he was beginning to get about his fill of solitude, he applied at a farmhouse for dinner.

The house was far back from any road, and the farmer and his wife were both elderly and strange. But they invited him in. It was not until then that he discovered they were the parents of a gangling, half-

witted son. And the half-wit grinned at him like one of those gibbering ghosts become incarnate.

Eventually free of the farmhouse, Davies struck back in the direction of St. Clair.

His bitterness had turned to quiet grief by this time. He had come to his decision. It had been foolish of him not to have come to this decision before. Still, it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. But the decision was this:

He would return to New York.

Yes; he would go back there and warn any other misguided youth—Phil, for instance—against the folly of seeking better surroundings elsewhere than right where he was. Himself he would plunge into fresh whirlpools of wickedness—taking risks he had never taken before, taking no more count of the generous impulses that had been his, and not caring what happened to him. Prison itself would be a relief after the rottenness of the outside world. Perhaps, even, he would do something that would bring him to "the chair"—and that would be best of all.

He came into a familiar road near St. Clair. He turned into a thicket where he knew there was a spring —a spring which Alvah Morley had shown him just a couple of days ago. And he would have drawn back.

For there was Alvah herself.

But Alvah had seen him, too—recognized him, with startled joy.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE HIGH TOWER

"HELLO!" he said. "What are you doing 'way out here?"

She answered him with a little wilting movement, looked back at the clear water of the spring.

"Had a drink?" he asked.

"I wasn't thirsty," she answered. "I just felt homesick for the spring. You—see, I used to come here when I was a little girl."

"A thousand years ago!"

"When my mother was still alive."

She rinsed a rusty can, filled it, passed it to him, and he drank.

They were silent.

Davies was glad to see the girl, but not particularly so. He was still as much engrossed by his personal distemper as he was by her presence—more so, possibly. He was only indifferently aware that she may also have been bearing an invisible pack of care, her moods and manners were so often sober. And, for a while, she seemed to be under the spell of that melancholy allusion she had made to her mother. Davies had heard from the colonel that Alvah's mother was a gracious lady, beautiful and young at the time of her death.

But in the midst of the somewhat aimless musings that possessed him, Alvah turned slightly, still more slightly smiled. It was an odd smile—one that made him ask:

"What's the matter?"

"I was thinking—thinking about that fifty dollars you wanted to subscribe to the Beating Heart Seminary."

"I didn't——"

She shook her head fondly, still smiled slightly.

"Professor Culbertson told me all about it," she informed him, gently. "I hope you won't deny it. I was very proud. I haven't so very much to cheer me up."

"What did he tell you?"

Bit by bit he got the information from her—the purport and a little more besides—of that conversation of the morning. He said:

"Professor Culbertson shouldn't deceive you like that. I'm going away."

"You—are—going away, Richard?"

"Yes."

Not a sign from either of them to indicate all that this may have meant in the lives of both of them.

"When?"

"Now."

"You were returning home for that?"

"That—and partly because I'd lost heart."

"There's no train till to-morrow."

"I'll walk."

"Good-by, Richard."

And she offered him her hand.

"Aren't you going to walk home with me?" he asked.

She looked away. He spoke again:

"I expected to see you at the house." He took her hand.

"I'll go back to the house with you," she said kindly, but without another apparent emotion. "I will, if you want me to."

"Where were you going?"

"Up the hill."

She waved her hand to the slope that here swelled up from the road—a rounded hill, chiefly in pasture, with its grass cropped short, but tufted here and there with gnarled bouquets of stunted trees.

"What's up there?"

An explanatory gesture that explained nothing.

"I'll go with you."

He didn't quite understand it, this mood of hers. He may have guessed that she was sorry to hear that he was going away, but she hadn't made the situation worse by protestations. He felt a little disquieted. But it was on her account. In the presence of her calm any troubles he himself may have had seemed trivial.

She hadn't spoken.

"Do you care if I go with you?"

"I'd be glad," she said.

They went up out of the hollow of the spring and the low valley of the road. The hill was bold, and the country, for miles around, was open. And the air was of a purity that rendered even small details brilliant

and distinct far away—black and white cattle in a field; two men at work on an unfinished bridge over the river, at what seemed a tremendous distance below; St. Clair in the distance, with the three church-steeples, and the school-house cupola, and Judge Berry's new water-tank, all sticking up so vividly among the trees that one could almost have counted the nail-holes.

Like that, the earth was brilliant mosaic, composed of a million details, each detail sharply defined, strikingly colored.

Half-way to the swelling crest they paused and looked.

"How different the earth and the sky!" said Alvah.

"All blue," said Davies, his face uplifted.

"Except for those few white clouds."

"And the earth looks little and the sky looks big," said Davies.

They walked on and on, mounting steadily higher, and in a great silence that was merely touched up by, so to speak, the high-lights of silence—a song sparrow's trill, very remote; and, remoter yet, the intermittent tinkle of a cow-bell; and, from the greatest distance of all, the echo of those last oddly detached words of theirs.

For, as yet, neither had spoken his or her thought; and they knew this; and they were anxious for such speech to begin yet afraid to set it going.

At last, they were over the last slope, and there they were as if on the top of an observatory. It might as well have been Pikes Peak—for any limit to their range of vision. There was a dizzy expanse. There

was a sense of flight. They sat down on an ancient, fallen trunk, bleached white by time.

They looked away, they were silent—each vividly conscious of the other's presence.

"I'm glad I met you," said Davies at last.

It was in his heart to tell Alvah why he had made up his mind to go away, but he had difficulty in finding the words. Somehow, it seemed to him that those troubles of his—so great and burdensome a little while ago—had vanished into nothingness—like the recent mosaic of the earth—nothing visible here but the infinite blue. He looked at her. She still had her profile to him, and what he saw dismissed from his mind utterly even the remaining vapors of what he had started out to say.

There was an impact against his consciousness as the thought lodged there that Alvah was beautiful.

Hitherto, he had considered her merely as good, as brave, as admirable from a fraternal point of view. But now, forgetful of his wonder, he found himself considering her delicate refinement of brow and nose, of chin and throat; that commingling of sadness and humor in her gray eyes and curving lips that suggested more than anything her relationship with the colonel. Most of all, though, he noticed her marble-white temple gleaming through a web of hair such as he had never noticed about her before.

The temple spoke to him, like something endowed with a voice, and this voice to be registered only by the ears of his innermost being.

Davies was Welsh; and they say the Welsh are mystics.

"Here resides wisdom," said the voice; "and here resides purity; and here resides courage and vision, constancy, and faith. All these, and more, reside beyond the white wall of this girl's temple, gossamered with its filaments of gold."

"My God!" said Davies, with reverence, bending the knees of his soul—but otherwise making neither sound nor movement; "and she once put her hand on my arm —told me I was the equal of any man!"

Alvah spoke:

"And I'm glad that I met you."

"I'm not so sure that I'm going away," he blurted. "Alvah!"

She turned to look at him. She drew slightly back. But he leaned forward.

"Richard! What's the matter?"

"Don't you know?"

His face was slightly forward. His dark eyes glowed up at her. He had dropped his hat on the grass, and Alvah noticed that his brow was damp. She worked a small handkerchief from her sleeve and started to touch his forehead.

He put his arms about her. He was fearful of using his strength, she was so slender, so unprepared.

Her temple was close to his lips.

He barely touched the fine strands of hair that covered it, but his lips remained there, second after second, while the silence took on life, as though it were shot through and through with tiny floating strands of music.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PARDON

But gradually—not too gradually—swiftly enough—these strands of music were underlaid with a booming strain of remorse. Here came the ghost-march out of his past and the specters had a brass-band. There was even a ghost of Tessie Wingate there—the girl he had kissed not twenty-four hours ago. She loomed as large as the ghost of Solly, the ghost of Phil, of Billy Gin, of old Sky-Blue.

He spoke rapidly—pressed for time—as one in danger of being overtaken by the advancing army.

"Alvah!"

"Dick!"

"I love you."

"I guessed—I knew."

"But I haven't any right."

"Oh, Dick, to love is everybody's right."

"But I'm bad—have been bad—am bad yet. My God!"

He kissed her on the lips, briefly, with awe beating its wings about the two of them. She drew away from him, startled, yet tender.

"You're not bad," she chided.

"I am. I've got to tell——"

"Don't tell me anything. The past doesn't matter."

"I'm worried."

"Leave that to women."

She succumbed again to the look in his eyes, the movement of his hands. This time, he clung to her a little longer. She was giving him a strength, by this mere contact with her, as a young mother might give strength and nourishment—for body and soul—to a child.

The booming of the ghost-army was no longer so loud. Davies was at least able to think.

There was a taste on his lips and a fragrance about himself that recalled to his mind some concept of a shriven sinner. Yet, how could he be shriven if he hadn't confessed? Desperately eager he was to keep this new thing he had discovered in the world—that he was! And for that very reason was he desperately afraid to lose this prize—lose it on a foul.

Alvah looked at him. He looked at her.

Their sight intermingled in a twisted column of white flame that went straight upward.

Then Davies, without thought, without premeditation, went down on one knee and his face was on Alvah's knees, there where she sat on the white old log. And there was nothing in the least self-conscious about it. Just reverent, and chivalrous—that is what it was; as any one with imagination could have told—by the silence of the earth, the purity of the sky, and the look in Alvah Morley's face.

She held his hands. She stroked his hair. Once, she leaned over until he was enveloped in the warmth

of her breath and her bosom and he felt a yet lighter touch on the top of his head.

He went into a species of sleep—the sweetest, most wonderful sort of sleep—if sleep it could be called—that he had ever known. Anyway, it was an abeyance of all ordinary physical sensation and of ordinary thought. At the same time, it was an awakening of finer senses—like the senses of some finer, nobler body only just now stirred to consciousness—as of some new Adam coming out of the earth, in response to the fiat of Creation—and this Adam not yet fallen—still of the substance and in the image of God.

A great calm possessed him.

This did not leave him even after he opened his eyes and so to speak, reëntered the body and the sphere to which he was habituated.

They had this top of the world all to themselves. They were as much alone, for the time being, as Adam and Eve could have been in the Garden of Eden. And now Davies, like the father of men, looked at Alvah as at some one and something that had been expired from his very soul—an incarnation of all that he had ever aspired to in the matter of cleanliness, honor, beauty, faith.

"Without you," he said softly, "I'll go to hell. No! I'd be already there."

She lowered her head.

"Go to sleep again," she whispered. "Go to sleep again with your head on my knees. Wait, I'll sit down on the grass with my back to the log."

"It's heaven with you," he said.

"Shut your eyes. I won't let anything hurt you."

"First—first——"

And again the wide and sparkling sky of the hill-top was filled with those floating strands of music. Davies could hear them. And he listened and listened and heard no sound at all of that grisly ghost-procession which had passed this way before.

Among the thousand thoughts and wide fractions of vision that displaced each other like a pageantry in his stimulated brain there was one particularly which impressed itself on his memory and imagination.

It was this:

Alvah possessed the power of making the country everything that Ezra Wood had indicated it to be. Alvah possessed the power to make the whole world like that. For him she did. With her to give him dominion over the haunts, the pitfalls, the passions and the frailties of his personal history and constitution, the whole world could become the world of Ezra Wood:

"*—sweet, and tender, and pure. All this under a sky that would make you understand why men call it heaven—and at last a sunset proclaiming the glory of God, and the stars His long-suffering mercy.*"

But there was no delusion in all this. His mind was too clear for that. There was going to be work ahead, and struggle ahead, and suffering, too, whatever the course he should elect.

Only, all the time that he was lying there on the short turf—face up, a sense of Alvah's hovering presence about him like a magical, transparent tent—he was conscious that he was still drawing in that strength

and nourishment which would render him fit to encounter whatever he might be called upon to go up against.

He didn't even mind it when he was aware that Alvah was telling him what a great and good man she considered Professor Culbertson to be—a trifle ungrammatical at times, but so innocent, so old-fashioned, so unworldly! He was listening to her; but not to her words; the music of her voice was enough.

He had the playful, uplifting fancy that a girl could look at any man—himself, for instance—and simply by doing so actually transform him into the being of her conception.

Ah, Alvah! Ah, Dick!

Is this not of the very essence of all miracles?

And Davies took her finger-tips and touched them to his forehead and held them there while he desired himself to be transformed—desired himself to be that which she alone in all the world perceived him to be.

Then, presently, he was visioning again; while Alvah, from the upper air, let fall about him as lightly as the notes of a lark the words of a song that helped him with his vision:

> "All up and down de whole creation,
> Sadly I roam,
> Still longing for de old plantation,
> And for the old folks at home."

He knew of a place like that. Wouldn't it be great if he should marry Alvah and settle down? Wouldn't it, though?

He harbored the vision; yet said nothing about it

even to Alvah. First he was going to have to find out about the thing, make his dispositions. And the idea as yet appeared almost too preposterously great.

But what if he could suddenly offer Alvah such a home!

CHAPTER XXXVII

"THE OLD HOMESTEAD"

THE home of his vision was a farm less than two miles out from St. Clair, which he had frequently passed in his drives about the country in search of insurance prospects—a broad meadow fringing the pike, a shady door-yard beyond this, reached by a private road and an old house in it half hidden by the trees; back of the house a number of barns, and back of the barns a wooded hill with a couple of roundly sloping fields on the flank of it.

He had always mentally labeled it "The Old Homestead!"

And it had always struck a sorrowful note from the heart of him when he read the sign on the meadow-fence announcing that the place was for sale.

Without having attached any importance to the information, he recollected now that he had picked up quite a little information about the property—here and there, among farmers and the villagers, he couldn't have told where. The place had belonged, or still belonged, to a family named Slocum—a family which had once been numerous and influential and properly rich, but which now had disappeared. He had heard other things—that the ground was poor, that the house was

in bad repair. And there had been something about the title—"They'll never get the title straightened out" something like that.

But none of this information was more than a passing shadow on the vision—scarcely a shadow at all. It gave the place an added touch of glamour.

More than that!

If no one else wanted the property, it would be all the easier for him to get it for himself—something that he scarcely could have aspired to had everything been in shipshape order and of a nature to appeal to those with more money to spend.

What did he care about the quality of the land? He wasn't going to be a farmer, anyway. And what did it matter to him if the house did possess a leaky roof? He would very shortly have the old place fixed up-to-date.

No; it was just the looks of the place that appealed to him—had appealed to him all along even before he had dreamed of acquiring such a home for himself—for such a wife!

The place, moreover, couldn't be so terribly dear. Few of the farmers he met on his rounds appeared to be rich. They were men who worked—chewed straws when they talked—wore muddy boots—complained of hard times. And yet, they had homes that differed only in degree from this place on which he found himself suddenly setting his heart.

It was two or three days later when Zeb Ricketts, in charge of the all-but-abandoned Slocum farm, saw

Davies drawing near along the St. Clair Pike. Zeb recognized the horse and buggy Davies used long before it would have been possible for any one without a telescope to have recognized Davies himself.

Zeb dropped a rake and put his elbows on the fence.

"That insurance feller's startin' out early," he said to himself. "Must have a special case."

Zeb talked to himself mostly, for he was all alone on the farm. Talking to himself was more satisfactory than talking to the one horse, the one cow, and the dozen or so fowls left on the place. The horse was crowbait and had the heaves. The cow was dry, slightly crazy, and as wild as a chipmunk. The hens were diligent egg-hiders.

"Bet he's goin' to drive over as far as Millville," he said. "Bet he's goin' to eat his dinner in the tavern over there."

And he fell into a melancholic reverie. He had been to Millville once—one Fourth of July—and Millville was across the line, in the next county—like going abroad for Zeb. He wished that something would turn up so that he could travel again.

Then his reverie came to an abrupt end.

"By jiminy!" he exclaimed. "He's turnin' in."

He rapidly deduced that it couldn't be insurance business that was bringing the visitor. He was correct. Davies drove slowly up the private lane, came to a stop not far from where Zeb stood.

"Good morning!" said Davies.

Zeb smiled at him for a long moment before answer-

ing. Zeb was cordial enough, but he was cautious. He wasn't going to commit himself.

"I read the sign on the fence," said Davies.

"Which one?"

"That the place was for sale."

"You might have meant the patent medicine signs," said Zeb, unbending a bit. "The feller that put 'em there hired that same rig you got from Jellison's."

"The place is for sale, isn't it?"

"I guess the feller'd be a liar who said it wasn't."

"Who's in charge?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Zeb, keeping Davies fixed with his glittering eye; "since you ask me, young fellow, why, it's me."

Davies got down, taking his time about it. His trips about the country had made him used to all sorts of people and their ways. He hitched his horse to an iron ring in the bark of the tree. He came over and squatted in the grass. Zeb, meantime, had seated himself on the stump of a tree which, in times remote, had been whitewashed for decorative purposes.

"Had many offers?" Davies asked.

This was bargaining, and Zeb was at home.

"Not more'n two or three a day."

"I think you're lying," said Davies in his heart. Aloud: "Then, I suppose, there's no use in my wasting your time."

Zeb eyed the stranger keenly. And all the time he was doing so two lines of thought were squirming in his brain. One was that this stranger was a greenhorn with plenty of money. The other twin-serpent of

thought was that it would be sweet to travel again. But he concealed the contents of his brain with subtle speech.

"If it was anybody but you," he said "maybe they wouldn't be any use." And he began to swing his leg.

"Why do you make an exception in my case?"

"Got my reasons."

"What are your reasons?"

"Maybe it's because we've got the same friend," said Zeb.

"Who is that?"

"Professor Culbertson," said Zeb. "I'm like you. I'm a follower of the Beatin' Heart."

There for a moment it was in Davies's heart to deny the allegation, but it merely made him smile.

He looked about him. Here in the door-yard the uncut grass was lush and deep even in the shade of the walnuts and the honey-locusts. The house looked even better than it did from the road. Run down? Yes. But roomy, deeply porched, homelike. Under that porch he could put up a hammock for Alvah to swing in. Here on this stump he could easily put a box of red geraniums.

"How much do you think the place is worth?" he asked.

Zeb was keen again.

"Cash or credit?"

"I expect to pay something down," said Davies, "and then pay the rest in installments."

Zeb went a trifle breathless.

"Was you expectin' to pay somethin' down right off?"

"I wasn't," said Davies; "but I could, if it were necessary."

"You'd have the live stock for security," urged Zeb.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HESITATIONS

But now that the matter of terms had come up, Davies began to be assailed by vague misgivings—some hint from his soul, perhaps, that his path to happiness wasn't going to be so simple as all that. He had a hundred dollars. He hesitated. Zeb wanted three hundred dollars down. Zeb kept talking about the imminence of other and better offers. At the same time Zeb couldn't forget the fact that both he and Davies were friends of Professor Culbertson. Zeb was walking into town every time the great man spoke. The upshot of the matter was that Davies finally paid his hundred dollars for a thirty-day option on the place.

Why not? Why these vague misgivings?

Misgivings and anticipations were using his heart for a battle-field all the rest of the day as he drove about the country in quest of new business. He was going to have to get a lot of new business. If he wanted to make his option good at the end of the thirty days he would have to come across with another two hundred. Could he do this? Of course he could—if Frank Tine, the insurance agent, did his part. But would Frank Tine do his part? Sure he would.

None the less, his misgivings won another skirmish.

He flashed up a mental portrait of his employer—broad of jaw but gimlet-nosed, affable, yet with a certain something in his eyes. And Frank had certainly been sitting in pretty steadily of late at that poker game over at the hotel.

"Forget it," Davies adjured himself.

On another day he got Colonel Williams to drive with him over to the county seat to inquire into the titles of the Slocum place. There was nothing radically wrong in that respect. He had taken the colonel into his confidence to some extent—had mentioned to the colonel the possibility of his buying this farm. And the colonel was moved.

"How much more would you be moved," said Dick to himself, but in thought, addressing the colonel—"how much more would you be moved if you knew that I was buying this for Alvah?"

Perhaps the colonel did suspect.

"I know of nothing," said the colonel, "that will so help a young man to self-respect as the acquisition of a bit of property that he has earned himself."

Just a generalization; nothing personal.

"I'd hate to get a piece of property," said Dick, "and then get bilked out of it."

Colonel Williams allowed himself a flight to a higher philosophical plane. He smiled with his eyes. He stroked his white, ante-bellum mustache. They were seated in the buggy at the time, jogging along through a mild and pleasant country. The colonel was looking straight ahead, yet with that obvious alertness of thought that meant he was aware of all things.

"Yes," he said, "a fair degree of caution is always advisable in business matters. But work—just work—is the essential thing. As Emerson says, 'no effort is ever lost.' No one can rob you except yourself. Even should you work hard and earn money to pay for a farm, and did pay for it, and then found that, through some mistake or trickery, both farm and money were lost to you, still you'd be the possessor of the equivalent, and more than the equivalent, of what had been taken from you."

"How about the other fellow?" asked Dick.

"What other fellow?"

"The one who put over the crooked business and copped the farm?"

"He'd have to pay," replied the colonel, gently and sagely. "It would become a debt—a debt bearing interest. The longer he deferred payment the higher the interest would become. He'd have his soul in pawn. If he persisted in non-payment he'd lose his soul."

The debt!

The phrase found lodgment in Davies's innermost consciousness.

He himself had a debt to pay. That wasn't easy money that had come to him during his years in New York. The so-called easy money, at its best, was a loan. And all the time the interest had been piling up—there in the devil's pawn-shop—where he had pledged his soul.

And he couldn't ask Alvah Morley to marry him—could he?—until he had paid off this debt of his, principal and interest, got his soul back again.

He had half intended to broach this matter to the colonel, tell the colonel that he was in love with Alvah; but now the very certainty that the colonel would regard him with favor tied Davies's tongue.

"A great truth," the colonel was saying; "a truth to heal and comfort all of us in times of grief and trouble. We lose our earthly possessions; we take our talents into some happy valley of the spirit and live like a king. We lose some one who was very dear and, from that time on, she—or he—is with us all the time. I knew a young man who lost his eyes. He recovered the power of a different sort of vision—you could tell it by the expression of his face. Perhaps you've noticed it—that placid expression the blind have."

Davies heard; but it was only with the surface of his hearing, so to speak. His inner hearing was still vibrant to the beat of that earlier phrase:

"*The debt! The debt!*"

Was it a part of the payment that he should tell the colonel just what manner of man was this Professor Culbertson the colonel had taken into his home?"

But the colonel was speaking again.

"The same thing is true of those who rob cities," Dick heard him say; and it was just as if the colonel had read his thought—just as if the colonel did have old Sky-Blue in mind. "The debt's the same—one that they will have to pay—one that will admit of no default. I often think of this when I read about the political grafters and all the other sorts of grafters who wouldn't stoop to rob an individual but who ap-

parently see no wrong in robbing a community. For them also 'the wages of sin is death.'"

"That's right," said Dick.

"It doesn't mitigate their deed," the colonel said, "in that the community may not be harmed, any more than an individual is harmed through being the victim of a theft or a chicanery."

"I follow you," said Dick; but it is doubtful whether he did or not.

"Why, I remember," said the colonel, "the instance of a certain impostor who once went about a certain section of the South in the guise of a religious zealot. A thoroughly bad man, you will say; one who made mock of sacred things in order to satisfy his private greed. But not even he, in the last analysis, can be said to have injured the community. He stirred dormant emotions that were better awake—quickened generous impulses which might otherwise have never been quickened at all."

"That's Sky-Blue," said Richard to himself.

And he decided that he'd better not say anything about the old crook—not just yet.

"A benign Providence," said the colonel, "seems to have arranged all things to its own ends—even the apparent crookedness and brutalities of the world—driving the individual, or the town, or the nation to look less and less to material and more and more to spiritual values."

"This is the old Southerner talking," said Davies to himself. "Or is he taking a shot at Sky-Blue after all?"

In any case, all that the colonel said, more or less, entered into his make-up—just like something that he had eaten, and digested, and made a part of himself. And this made him love not only the colonel all the more, but Alvah, and even Sky-Blue—made him look with greater tranquillity on Frank Tine, and St. Clair, and on the world in general; aware that all that happened to him might be for the better in the long run, anyway.

It was just as well for him, perhaps, that he did get this increment of strength and wisdom from the colonel. The time drew near when he was going to need it.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ACID AND ALKALI

THERE'S an old rule. Almost every one has noticed it. It keeps turning up in the lives of all sorts of men, from Moses down. The rule is this:

Just as soon as a man, or a woman, or an angel, reaches some high point of moral supremacy, just so soon the dark forces begin their game of bringing the climber down.

Davies didn't codify the rule. He may not have recognized it. But the rule was making itself felt none the less.

In the first place, he had a lot of trouble and lost a lot of time trying to get Frank Tine where he could speak to him in private and at length. Frank certainly was keen on the poker festival over at the hotel. But Davies finally cornered his chief in a little room that served them both as office.

"I've paid a hundred down," Davies explained; "and promised to pay two hundred in thirty days. That's three weeks from now."

"What's the price?" asked Tine.

"Fifteen hundred in all."

"I understand the title's no good."

"The title's all right," said Dick. "I've had it looked into."

"And if you don't show up with that two hundred—what was the date?"

"Three weeks from to-day."

"What will happen?"

"I'll lose my option, that's all," said Dick. His dark eyes noted a spot on Tine's none-too-tidy coat. "You ought to use some of this cleansing soap. I carry it with me. Let me show you."

"Still sticking to the soap," said Tine; but his thought was elsewhere. His usually shifty eyes were steady, turned inward.

Davies had come back with the office towel from the washstand in the closet. He had moistened a corner of it. He applied this to the spot on Tine's coat.

"Stick to it," he said, "because, somehow, I like it—clean, smells good, like to use it myself."

"You keep yourself spick and span, all right," the insurance man complimented him. But his thoughts were still elsewhere. They ranged out to that farm this odd assistant of his had taken steps to acquire. For, like most insurance men, Tine was also a real estate agent. He should have had that Slocum property in mind—would have had it in mind if the poker game hadn't been running so strong over at the hotel. "How does the place look?"

"Great!" said Davies. "Run down—that's how I got it so cheap; but just a little money spent on it, and it'll be a regular home."

Tine spoke to himself:

"Harold Peebles wants a place like that. He's a sucker with plenty of money. I could put it over on him."

"I just wanted to remind you," said Davies, good-naturedly, as he finished his task. "There, that spot's gone! Just wanted to remind you so you'd be there with the commissions when the new business comes rolling in."

"Because," said Tine, with an inverted smile, "if you don't show up with your old two hundred——"

"I lose my hundred and my option," Davies repeated, cheerfully.

It may have occurred to him that he was taking a pretty big chance in thus putting himself virtually at the mercy of a small-town gambler like Frank Tine. But he was in the mood for taking chances. Wasn't it true, anyway, that not Frank Tine nor any one could do anything to injure him? No one could do that but himself.

But he was barely at the bottom of the dusty stairs leading to the street before he met Simp Fisher. It struck Davies that Simp's expression had even more of sheepish suffering in it than of evil. He felt sorry for Simp—felt a friendship for him.

"Hello!" said Davies.

"Hello!" said Simp.

"Understand you're framing up a suit against me."

Simp ran a careful hand over his jaw. He looked across the sunlit street, glanced at a couple of farmers who were tying up their teams on the hither side.

"It ain't an ill-will suit," he averred nervously. "Doc

Flenner says I've been injured for life. I ain't hardly been able to eat on that jaw for two weeks."

"Maybe you got a piece of toothpick stuck in it."

"No, sir!"

"What's doc say it is?"

"Dock ain't sayin'. He's countin' on gettin' called as an expert. His bill's high enough as it is."

"How much?"

"Twelve dollars," said Simp, with an increase of nerves. "You settle that, and I'll call the suit. We'll get even with that dern Peebles."

Davies's first impulse was to laugh at Simp and tell him to go to the devil, but the impulse faded almost at the moment of its inception. Down the street, in a lofty old buggy drawn by his skeleton nag with the heaves, came Zeb Ricketts. And Zeb was all dressed up—new clothes, new hat, new celluloid collar that glistened, new buggy-whip. An emissary from the Old Homestead, a mentor of new responsibilities. Davies couldn't go into that new home of his with the curse of a law-suit hanging over him; and, suddenly, that impulse of his was altogether reversed.

"Shake hands on it, Simp," he said.

Simp had a lurch of delight strange in one injured for life.

"And tell Doc Flenner to send the bill to me," said Davies, gravely. "I'm sorry you got your face in my way."

Simp grinned.

Not even when, later that day, Constable Winch spied him from afar and hailed him with amiable intent would

Davies allow himself to be shaken in the new strength he was building up.

"Could you loan me a couple of dollars?" the constable whispered with great haste. "I could let you have it right back."

Davies sighed.

"Sure."

"You couldn't make it a five?" the constable suggested.

"Two's the limit," Davies replied.

"Because," said Winch, "I just heard somethin' that might interest you."

"Which is?"

"You know that Zeb Ricketts, don't you? I understand him to say a while ago, when he was over to the Red Trunk Clothing Store, as how you'd paid him some money on the Slocum place."

"Well, what of it?"

"Well, later on, I see Zeb and Frank Tine whisperin' together back of Jellison's livery 'n' feed stable. Nothin' wrong. Only thought you'd like to know."

Davies was vaguely disquieted by the news that Winch had given him, inconsequential though this on the surface appeared to be. But he fought the feeling off.

There for a while he was even trying to stifle his knowledge of old Sky-Blue and of what sort of a work old Sky-Blue was engaged upon. What was that theory about folks being good if you would only believe them to be good?

But as to that, things were coming to a head.

CHAPTER XL

"I AM THE PRINTING-PRESS"

He had got home from the country late one night, when, after putting up his horse at Jellison's, his route took him past the *Messenger* office, and he was both surprised and pleased to see that there was a light shining from beyond the partition separating the mechanical end of the *Messenger* plant from the business and editorial department. Davies wanted some cards printed; and, unless he put in his order now, he knew that he would be forgetting it again. So he tried the front door; the door was locked. He went around to the back of the building, and he could hear some one in there running a foot-press. It was useless to knock. Whoever was running the press would be deafened by his own noise. So Davies entered the place.

And there was Sky-Blue himself—coat off, all alone, treading away at the foot-press, feeding in the sheets and pulling them out printed—a picture of happy industry.

"Well! Well! Well!" the bishop laughed, so soon as he had seen who the intruder was.

He had instantly stopped the running of the press. He utilized the intermission now to straighten some of the sheets he had printed. He had put on an old

pair of spectacles which he seldom used. These were resting on the end of his nose, and he now looked through them, tilting his head back to do so, the better to admire his handiwork.

"Didn't know I was a printer; did you, Chicky?"

"No!"

"Well, I'll have to learn you that, too," said the bishop, "some time when you and me are shut of this damn hole."

"I'm not aiming to get shut of it," said Davies, with intensity.

But the bishop ignored him.

"There are always times," he went on, sagely, as he continued to examine his work, "when knowledge like this comes in handy. Oh-h, the power of printer's ink! Oh-h, the mar-r-velous invention of the printing-press! There are suckers who wouldn't believe the Bible if it was writ by hand, but who'll swaller anything you want 'em to if it's printed."

"How does it come you're doing all this hard work yourself?" Davies asked.

"That's something else," said Sky-Blue, reverently. "Oh-h, the poor people that got ketched through not knowin' how to do things for themselves! My heart bleeds for 'em, Chicky! My heart bleeds for 'em."

"Well, what have you been printing?" Davies asked. "Something crooked?"

"Oh, there you go!" cried Sky-Blue with sudden temper. "There you go! Me here breakin' my back! You comin' in with your lily-white hands and your

brassy cheek! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! But you ain't!"

And for a long time the old man was so touchy at Davies's slur on his character that he would hardly talk at all. But it evolved that he had borrowed the *Messenger's* job department merely to recall the days of his youth—"an old man's whim"—and had seized the occasion to run off a number of things: professional cards, letterheads, excerpts of letters from famous people. Some of these letters began "Dear Professor," and two began "Dear Culbertson," but the more familiar form was reserved for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the King of Sweden.

Sky-Blue went over these things with pride and he gradually softened. Finally, he said:

"I'm glad you come in. You don't deserve it, but I had you in mind all the time I was doin' this last job o' work. It's comin' along to the time, Chicky, when you and me are goin' to do the grand vamoose."

Davies was silent.

"Don't you want to hear about it?" asked Sky-Blue.

"Sure."

"Then, why don't you show it, instead of acting like an ungrateful purp?"

"Gee, you're touchy to-night," said Davies. "Go on, tell me all about it. I'm listening."

"I'm getting ready to make the biggest killin' of my career," said the bishop, with returning indulgence, "and I'm goin' to let you in on it. Listen! I've pulled off a hundred of these: Number—date-line—

then, 'St. Clair City Bank, Pay to the order of B. N. Culbertson, foundation Beating Heart Seminary'—line for the amount, line for the signature."

"These are checks!" Davies exclaimed.

"Checks they be, Rollo!"

"You can't get folks to sign those."

"Can't I?" The Bishop laughed. "Watch me—watch me and learn! This was what I was talkin' about. Oh-h, my poor Richard! When you see the good people of St. Clair signin' these like they was some sort of a pledge, and me pinnin' a pure white ribbon on each dear soul, and the little children singin' Sunday-school songs——"

His voice choked up, and there were tears in his eyes.

"They're as good as gold," he whispered, mastering his emotions. "I'll cash every damn penny of 'em if it cleans out the bank. And I'm splittin' it with you. Before they wake up we'll be in California."

"Count me out," said Davies.

The bishop let out a roar:

"*What?*"

"You can count me out!"

Sky-Blue's mouth was open. Words failed him. For a moment or two, they did. When he finally spoke, his voice was soft and reasonable. But the undercurrent of it was stiff.

"By Jupiter, Chicky!" he said. "Are you goin' to go on play-actin' until I leave you out of my plans? Are you? Or are you goin' to be as open and above-

board and honor-bright as I am? Are you entirely lackin' in sincerity? Answer me, yes or no."

"I'm a handing it to you straight," said Davies.

"Oh, you are!"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, then, let me tell you something; since you're so smart. What you said about that old fossil, Colonel Williams, not havin' a cent turns out to be the truth."

"I know it's the truth—have known it all along."

"Oh, you did!"

The bishop was ironical, but it was plain he was somewhat shaken. He stuck to his guns, however.

"And I suppose you knew," he continued, "that he and the whole damn passel of you was goin' to be thrown out of that house before long!"

Davies didn't know that, and his face showed it.

"O-ho!" crooned Sky-Blue.

"Where'd you get that?" Davies asked.

"Now, you're askin'," the bishop replied with benevolent triumph. "Regular college-boy, but has to fall back on o-l-l-d Professor Culbertson!" He chuckled. "Well, I'll tell you. I ain't like you. By deserts, I'd keep you guessin' like you tryin' to keep me guessin'. But you're young. You got a lot to learn."

"Who's going to throw them out?" Davies demanded.

"And you've been workin' with him!"

"Frank Tine?"

"By jings! Guessed it at last!"

"Do you mean it?"

"Sure, I mean it! He owns all the mortgages, don't he? Goin' to foreclose! Nothin' strange about that, is there, Chicky? Or didn't they never do such things where you come from?"

CHAPTER XLI

FAITH AND MORTGAGES

THERE fell another period of silence between them. Davies saw it now—or believed that he saw it. All that beautiful philosophy that the colonel had been giving him on their ride to the county-seat was the colonel's own swan-song. That was what it was. The colonel had spoken with death in his heart—full knowledge of this impending catastrophe. Yet not a word, not a hint, had he dropped to call attention to his trouble.

"I thought I'd fetch him," said Sky-Blue aloud to himself.

But Davies ignored the taunt. For the present he did. His mind was running back once more to that scene at the bottom of the stairs. He remembered now. How could he have forgotten? The colonel had spoken then about having exhausted his money. Or it may have been Alvah's money. In any case, nothing could have come in since then except the modest amounts that he himself had pressed upon the colonel from time to time in lieu of regular payment for board and lodgings.

For the matter of that, the situation had grown worse since the illustrious Culbertson had come there

to roost. Culbertson paid no rent. And Culbertson's appetite ran to chops and other high-priced viands such times as he was not invited out.

"I thought I'd fetch him," Sky-Blue repeated.

The elder was laughing softly to himself as he went about the work of distributing the type he had set. He did this with a skill and a speed that fascinated Davies even in the midst of the anger he felt.

"Who told you Tyne was going to foreclose?" Davies inquired at last.

"Oh, my! Oh, my!" laughed the bishop.

"It's nothing to joke about," said Davies, briefly.

Sky-Blue turned from his work. He went serious, went a little tender. His voice was shaky and sympathetic.

"Frank's a crook, Chicky," he said, "as I have already warned you. He's got to clean up somehow, and square up, and he knows it, or he'll be havin' one of these here incorruptible insurance-inspectors droppin' in to tell him all about the s-a-a-cred rights of the widders and the orphans."

"Good Lord!"

"Terrible, aint it?"

"Yes; it is terrible."

"Especially," said the elder, "when, like as not, they'll pinch you, too. I warned you against associatin' with a crook."

Davies steadied himself.

"I'm not thinking of that," he said. "My conscience is clear." He ignored the old man's smile. "I'm thinking about what may happen to the colonel

and—and Alvah—if they have to leave that house."

"Well, now, maybe they won't have to leave it."

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe I can induce Brother Tine not to foreclose."

"Can you?"

"I can," said the bishop; "but, by the Lord Harry, I won't if you keep on playin' the milksop!"

"I'm not playing the milksop!"

"There! There! Forgive me, Richard! I spoke before I thought." He let his voice tremble. "Richard, are you absolutely devoid of all the finer sentiments? Don't you know the meanin' of the word affection? Can't you understand the workin's of the heart of a lonely old man like me?"

Davies was silent. It was a moment or two before Sky-Blue got up steam to continue.

"You don't want to see me stay in this place till I rot; do you, Richard? No more than I want to see you waste your young life here. What is there here? They don't know how to season their food. Fried rumpsteak! Fried taters! Fried sinkers! Everything fried!—fried or boiled! My stomach's givin' out, Richard. And the trouble is I don't dare take a sip of liquor! It's killin' me, Richard. You don't want to see old Sky-Blue die for want of a mouthful of fittin' whisky; do you, Richard?" He almost cried. "Why," he concluded, "I can't even get a chaw of proper fine-cut."

Davies remained silent. He would have to work—that was all—work harder even than he had expected to work—earn not only enough money to insure that

payment which he himself was going to have to make to put through his deal for the Old Homestead, but enough, as well, to induce Tine to carry over the mortgages.

Work!

Work to pay a debt!

He couldn't kick. So he told himself. He had this coming to him. But would it—could it—all turn out all right?

In the meantime the bishop was continuing his lamentations.

"I been keepin' Lent fer quite a long time now, Chicky. You got to hand it to old Sky-Blue fer that. There ain't too many comforts fer a man of my years. A dram! A chaw! Decent victuals! I been doin' without 'em all, Chicky. And you can't say I haven't worked."

"I'm thinking about the colonel," Davies announced, with a note of solemnity.

"And little Alvah," quivered the bishop, mockingly.

"Yes, and Alvah!"

"Well, you're wastin' your time."

"How so?"

"Are you deef, Richard? Or have you lost your memory? Or perhaps you think I was lyin' to you just now."

"I had forgotten how poor they were."

"I was fooled, too," the bishop admitted. "I was fooled, too—same as you was. First off, I admit, I didn't know what to think. But I sort of had my suspicions. Well, one afternoon when Alvah and the colo-

nel was out to the cemetery, and you was away, I went over the colonel's private papers."

"You damned old scoundrel!" Davies ejaculated.

The bishop gave him a glance of surprise, but wasn't otherwise affected.

"It was dirty, I admit," he confessed, without shame. "But it had to be done. I owed it to you, Chicky. I don't expect your gratitude. But I was doin' it on your account."

"On my account?"

"On your account. 'Here's Richard,' I says, 'thinkin' that, anyway,' I says, 'he's goin' to get this here house and lot by marryin' the niece; and the first thing you know,' I says, 'he's goin' to find himself spliced up'—oh, I did it myself when I was your age! I ain't makin' sport of you!—'spliced up,' I says, 'with a wife who's like to be a sticker and not even this old ramshackle dump to make her worth while.'"

Davies would have broken in on the discourse, but no words would have expressed what he felt. The bishop, anyway, wasn't paying any attention to him. He spied an old corncob pipe that some printer had left at the top of the case. The bishop took this, saw that there was half a load in it under the ashes. He lit it, took a puff or two. But it wasn't to his liking, and he put the pipe back.

The interlude was sufficient to give Davies a chance to master himself, call on his philosophy.

"Bishop," he said, "I'm going to tell you something. You may not be able to understand it, but I'll tell you, anyway."

"Shoot."

"I haven't asked her yet, but if—if Alvah—would marry me I'd be only too proud, too happy."

"But why?"

"You ought to know. You talk about it enough."

"What's that?"

"Love!"

The bishop was dazed.

"Good God!" he choked; "you make me look like an amateur."

CHAPTER XLII

FAR THUNDER

THE weather was changing from fair to unsettled. It was hot. It was humid. Day after day the sun rode brazen through a blackish mist. From time to time the sound of distant thunder came rolling from points beyond the horizon, now to the south, now to the north, again from the east or from the west. All this premonitory of an approaching storm.

Conditions were not quite normal. A storm was needed to clear the atmosphere.

And, as so often happens, these weather conditions found, if not their reflection, at least their reflex in the spirit of the people. Something was coming off—something that would clear the atmosphere.

This was so with St. Clair in general.

There was no doubt about it—Professor Culbertson, of London, England, had got under the skin of the town. Long ago, the council chamber in the town hall had proved insufficient to accommodate the crowd. So he had been granted the use of the Odd Fellows' Hall—a place with a reputation for size. The little boys of the town would brag about it: "We got the biggest meetin'-place in the county, we have!" And now the illustrious Culbertson was holding his meetings there; and filling it, too.

"Sniffing the Asphodel! Oh-h-h, how they lap it up!"

And the bishop had taken to the curing of disease by "laying on of hands."

That was one of the purposes of the Beating Heart Seminary—to cure all manner of aches, tooth, heart, and soul. He was going to have room in the seminary for just so many. Not pupils, but disciples! And he was getting disciples fast. Disciples of the Beating Heart! Non-sectarian! No worthy seeker to be turned away for reasons of age or sex!

"That always fetches them," said old Sky-Blue; "no worthy seeker turned away for reasons of age or sex!"

Then Culbertson had let it be known to his faithful that Wichita wasn't going to get the seminary after all. No! After prayerful consideration, and after consultation with that dear sister of his who lived out there, he had decided that—as a mark of gratitude—and love—he'd establish the seminary right here in St. Clair.

To Colonel Williams and Alvah he made an even more disconcerting promise. He told them that they needn't let the mortgage on the Flowery Harbor worry them any more. He was going to buy the Flowery Harbor himself and make this the seminary. It was a plan that he had worked out with his dear young friend Richard. Yes! Richard was occupying himself with the purchase of another home for them. But this was to be a surprise. They mustn't say anything about it until Richard sprang it on them himself.

And Davies could tell that there was something afoot

—something that he couldn't understand; could tell it by the magic softness in Alvah's eyes whenever her eyes met his.

Fifty times it was in his heart and on his lips to tell her that he could never live again without her, that he loved her so he would surely die unless she became his wife. But he held back. He hadn't won his right to her yet. He was still in the midst of battle. No! He was on the eve of battle. And this battle was to determine, once and forever, the future course of his life.

Those distant thunderings that daily came out of the brazen sky had as much a personal meaning for himself —his inner, intuitive self—as if he were a commanding general and these the rumbling of a hostile artillery.

Nor were his misgivings wholly intuitive. They had a basis, in fact.

Frank Tine was showing himself to be increasingly shifty, hard to locate, difficult to coöperate with.

One day Davies brought into town a rich old farmer who was ready to take out three different policies for goodly amounts, and Tine failed to appear at the office at the hour when he said he would be there. And Davies waited just so long, then went over to the hotel, went up-stairs to the room where the poker game was in progress, forced his way in.

Frank was sitting in, just as Davies knew he would be—room rather dark, crowded but quiet, three tables going.

"I'll see you," said Frank to the man who had been bidding against him. The man was a foreigner, locally

known as Jason, a professional, white but burly, venomous-eyed, a friend of Gus, in charge of the "kitty."

"Three aces," said Jason.

"And I'll see you," said Dick, touching Tine on the shoulder.

"You're buttin' in," snarled Jason.

There came back to Davies a whiff of poison straight out of one of those old joints he had known in lower Manhattan. He went right around the table to where Jason sat, shoved a marble-hard fist under his nose.

"Say, you stiff," he gritted, "do you want this in the puss?"

Jason didn't, and the incident closed by Davies bringing Tine back to the office.

But things couldn't go on like this—not indefinitely.

And there was the way Zeb Ricketts was acting. There was something about Zeb that Davies couldn't fathom. Zeb was still the same old rube on the surface—sly, cautious but amiable. A little too amiable! That was it. And also given to disappearances. Not so eager as he should have been to talk about the coming transfer of the place.

Then Frank Tine disappeared.

It was the last day but one that the option had to run.

Davies kept his nerve. He had more than enough money coming to him to meet his payment. Frank would show up, give him the promised check. There was plenty of time to pass this through the bank—four hours—it was now only eleven.

But Tine wasn't to be located anywhere—not at his

office, nor at his boarding house, nor at the hotel. At none of these places had he been seen even—not since the night before.

"You ain't the only one that's lookin' for him," said Constable Winch. "There's a stranger been inquirin' for him."

"What sort of a stranger?"

"A slick one—slick!" The constable whispered: "If you ask me, he looks like one of these here insurance inspectors."

But Davies was too distraught to listen.

Each moment dragged. Yet the hours were wearing away. And all this time it was as if some great weight was suspended over himself, and St. Clair, and the world, ready to come crushing down.

The weather had something to do with this, no doubt —hotter, stuffier, an increase of humidity, recurrent thunder from the west and south, an occasional scatter of drops, large and warm, as if the sky itself were sweating up there.

Three o'clock came, and still no Tine.

Davies imagined the desperate measure of writing out a check and carrying this out to Zeb Ricketts.

"I'll get Tine before to-morrow morning," he said to himself, "and make him shell out what he owes me if I have to kill him."

He prepared the check. He called for his rig at Jellison's. He headed for the Old Homestead. And all the time he was doing this he was telling himself that everything was all right, that it was bound to be all right, that Luck couldn't take a fall out of a fel-

low who had been trying as hard as he had to do the right thing, live straight, make good.

It was almost as if Alvah were there at his shoulder whispering to him, telling him to brace up.

But while he was still a quarter of a mile or more away from the farm he could see that there was something doing—could see a couple of strange wagons in the yard, men moving about. That must be Zeb making ready for the transfer, moving out the last of his personal effects.

But the first person he recognized when he came driving up the private lane from the pike was Peebles, Harold Peebles—Tessie Wingate's latest flame—that handsome lawyer who was to have engineered Simp Fisher's suit for damages.

What was he doing there?

And the worst of it was that Peebles merely gave Davies a look of semi-polite inquiry, not untouched by a certain insolence, such as any landholder is apt to turn on a trespasser.

As for Zeb Ricketts, Zeb was nowhere to be seen.

Davies's heart began to pound.

CHAPTER XLIII

LIGHTNING

"WHERE's Zeb?" asked Davies.

"Who?"

"Zeb Ricketts."

Peebles was distant. He was cold.

"Mr. Ricketts?"

"Yes."

"I don't know."

Peebles discovered that his advice was needed by one of the workmen nearer the house. Davies looked at these workmen—two painters, a carpenter. They appeared to expect their orders from Harold. Davies got out and hitched his horse. His heart had ceased to pound. His heart was standing still.

"Oh, Peebles," he called; and he was afraid that his voice would betray him.

"In a moment," Harold answered him.

Davies breathed deep. Finally, the handsome lawyer turned and hailed him.

"Well, what is it?"

"I want to speak to you," Davies replied.

"Go ahead."

"In private."

As luck would have it, there was a sharp patter of

rain. It sent the painters and the carpenter to scurrying around to the back of the house, brought Harold and Davies together on the porch. That porch! Where, in fancy, Davies had seen Alvah swing!

"Say," Davies exclaimed, softly; "just what's the idea? What do you think you're doing here?"

Possibly Peebles was influenced by the fact that Davies's verbal assault had been so softly spoken that the workmen could not hear and that hence he had no witnesses. He also elected to speak softly.

"Why, I own the place."

"You own the place!"

"Perfectly."

"Not yet you don't."

"Surely, you are mistaken."

"I've still got an option on the place, and it runs to six, and I've got the money to complete the payment——"

He was stretching the facts a little. But it didn't matter. He could sense the adamant back of Harold's putty prettiness, and the adamant was not of Harold's own. It was the adamant of law and circumstance and of the ordinance of God. And this, Davies was saying to himself—or some inner voice was saying for him—was a part of the debt that he owed to society. This was a punishment that had come upon him.

"Very strange," Peebles was saying.

And there wasn't the slightest perturbation in the fellow's voice. Peebles was a lawyer.

"I'm giving it to you straight," said Davies.

"No doubt."

"And where do you come in?"

"Precisely where you say you come in—only, instead of an option, I have purchased the place outright, from the Slocum heirs, through Mr. Ricketts, Mr. Tine acting as my agent."

There was no doubt about the truth of all this. There had been plenty of collateral evidence—enough to have warned him had he not been so infatuated with what else had been going on. And Peebles, who was not hard-hearted, read collapse in Davies's eyes, and possibly thought to put him out of his misery with a *coup de grâce.*

"You haven't got a leg to stand on," he blurted.

"You lie!" cried Davies.

Peebles got the danger-signal an instant too late. He had started to run. But Davies had seized him by both lapels of his coat, held him powerless. There was a momentary pause. It was long enough for the New Yorker to get back this power of thought.

"In here for you," he said, "where there won't be any witnesses."

And he shoved the lawyer against the front door with such force that the door gave and they stumbled into the front parlor of the house—twilit, musty, with old haircloth furniture and crayon portraits glowering at them out of the gloom.

"What do you want?" Peebles panted.

"I want to talk to you."

"This is an assault."

"So is this!"

And Davies shook him.

Peebles, floundering, found his hand in contact with one of those pink conch-shells once popular as ornaments, sharp-edged, weighing about a pound. An ugly weapon. He tried to use it. But Davies knocked the thing from Peebles's hand, hurled Peebles, crashing, into an old haircloth armchair. There Peebles sat.

There was a quaver of lightning.

In the flickering illumination the crayon portraits showed themselves ugly and dark, placid and solemn—Aunt Polly Slocum, her hair in a net, breastpin as big as a saucer; Uncle Norman, chin-whiskers, slightly cross-eyed; Little Sammy, preternaturally old. They were all looking down at the scene like mourners at a funeral.

It was a funeral.

For Richard Davies it was. His own!

But he made an effort, brought himself back to life again. He contemplated Peebles.

"Tell me about it," he ordered.

"It was Frank Tine," said Peebles. "He told me that it would be all right—that you weren't going to make your option good.

"So he knew about my option?"

"Yes."

"What was the rush?"

"Frank was in a hurry. He wanted the money."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. The last I saw him was late last night."

"And Zeb Ricketts?"

"I don't know."

Davies took a step in advance. He put out a finger and thrust up Peebles's chin.

"Look me in the eye," he said. "Tell me what you do know."

"I was in a hurry, too," said Peebles. "I promised this place to Tessie Wingate. She was mad when she heard you were likely to get it."

"Tessie Wingate! What has she got to do with it?"

"We're getting married—to-morrow."

There was a sharper flash of lightning, a bang of splitting thunder.

"It must have struck something," said Peebles, trying to get back to normal.

"It's me that's been struck," said Davies in his heart.

But his mind also curiously sought the normal—a shipwrecked sailor pulling for the shore. He thought of his horse out there without shelter. Yes. He'd better get it under a shed, or be getting back to town.

CHAPTER XLIV

BEFORE THE STORM

THERE had been a slight gust of rain, but this had stopped. The storm held off, rumbling, quivering. The atmosphere was heavier than ever. With a quickened pace that needed no whip, the old horse swung into the road that led back to town.

Davies wasn't organizing his thought into words, but he was undoubtedly praying for light. And light was to be vouchsafed him. To some extent it was.

Just as he neared the railroad line the gates went down and he heard the four-twenty-three local climbing the hill out of St. Clair. He idly watched the train draw near. There was nothing to do but wait. The engine was old. The train was a composite of freight and passenger cars. There for a while it looked as if the old locomotive would never be able to top the grade at all.

"That's me," Davies reflected. "I'm pulling a load like that. It's breaking my back."

And he found himself panting and straining, trying to help the engine along. It was going to mean something to him if the train got over the rise. If the locomotive got away with it, why, so would he. The outfit couldn't have been making more than three miles an

hour. It crossed the pike—first the locomotive, then a dozen milk-cars, then a carload of squealing pigs, then the smoker.

Just as the smoker was half-way past, he caught the gleam of a celluloid collar inside an open window. And that was Zeb Ricketts in there, all dressed up, smoking a cigar, outward bound.

The thing smote Davies; but not in the way it would have smitten him earlier in his career—not in the way that he himself would have expected five minutes ago, perhaps.

"Easy money!"

Yea, Lord! That was a picture of easy money he had seen. Zeb was a fool. But there were others in the world.

The light was still with him, the mental bedazzlement, as the remainder of the train rumbled past. And he scarcely noticed that the cars were going at a faster pace, that the old locomotive had topped the grade.

What he noticed was that a new Ford had been held up by the gates on the other side of the track, and that there was also some one in this car whom he recognized. It was Tessie Wingate. She so absorbed his attention that he had no eyes at all for Tessie's companion—he who drove—whoever that might be.

Should he say something to her?

Should he call out something cutting and ironical about that new home of hers?

But before he could make up his mind, the gates swung up and the little automobile gave a jump. It

was past him. Then it had come to a sudden stop, and Davies was hearing his name.

"Dick!"

That was Tessie. She had nerve. What did she want? He pulled up his horse and looked back. Tessie had risen from her seat, was standing up.

"Hello!" said Davies.

"I want you to congratulate me," she called out to him.

"What on?"

"My marriage."

"Oh!"

"You're the first I've told."

"You're a little slow, Tessie," he said, without unkindness. "I've just seen Harold."

"Harold!"

A look of amused embarrassment swept over Tessie's plump features. But she had hardly echoed the name of the lawyer before the driver of the car stretched his neck and also looked around. It was Simp Fisher, disguised with goggles and cap.

"Congratulate me, too," he called. "It's an elopement, and I'm the lucky man."

The Ford sprang away.

Was Harold destined to see them pass?

"I should worry," said Davies. But it occurred to him that this might be the day of sorrows for others than himself.

This occurred to him again and with an increased weight when he finally drove up to the curb in front of the two-story brick building where Frank Tine had his

office. Constable Winch, who evidently had been waiting for him there, jumped across the sidewalk before he could leave the buggy.

"Drive off with me," said Winch, in low, excited tones.

"What for?"

"Tell you when we're away from here."

"Tell me here."

"Can't."

"What do you want?" Dick demanded, brutally. "Want to make another touch?"

Winch ignored the aspersion.

"He's skipped. I'm warning you."

"Who's skipped?"

"Tine—and none too soon. You know what I told you."

So Tine had skipped. He could believe the story easily enough. He should have seen it all in advance. He had been sufficiently warned. He considered a moment.

"Don't lose no time," said Winch. "I've throwed him off your trail. I'll go with you—tell you the rest as we go along."

"Thrown who off my trail?"

"That slick stranger I was tellin' you about."

"Ah, go on!" said Davies, and he got out of the buggy, hitched his horse.

All the time that he was doing it the constable was flustering around him like a hen with a single chick.

"You're crazy," said Winch. "He's up there in the office now, mad as a hornet at lettin' Tine give him the

slip. Insurance inspector. Power to arrest. He'll throw all the blame on you."

Davies turned on Winch.

"What do you think I am?" he demanded. "A crook?"

He shouldered the constable to one side, without apology, and started for the door of the hallway.

There he paused again, had a glance for the brooding storm. The weather was hotter than ever, more oppressive. All the smile and lure of nature had gone out of it. God, but he was homesick just then for the city of his youth!

CHAPTER XLV

SHELTER

"Don't mind if I go up with you, do you?" the constable asked, with a touch of nerves.

It was clear that Winch was peeved a little, just a trifle hurt at Davies's cool reception of his news, especially of his hint at flight; but Mr. Winch was standing on his dignity—as one must who has done all that one can in difficult circumstances.

"No, I don't mind," said Davies.

He was beyond the stage of minding anything very much. So he felt at that particular moment. But he wondered somewhat at the present interest of the constable. That Winch should have warned him to flee was comprehensible enough. Had he accepted the warning, Winch would have regarded this as the legitimate occasion for another touch. That was all. And he would have stood absolved of those former so-called loans as well. Sufficient inspiration all this for Winch, God bless his honest heart! But what could Winch be up to now?

Winch reached the top of the stairs first. He threw open the office door.

"Well, inspector," he announced; "here's your man!"

Davies paused.

But before he could find any words to express the newly awakened sentiments that were bubbling inside of him, a cheery voice was booming from the interior of the room inviting them both to enter.

Davies saw a large man—exceedingly large—a fat man with a round face—occupying the chair which had been Frank Tine's.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Davies; I am Mr. Marsh."

Mr. Marsh's face may have been round, but it was strong like his voice. There was something of the turtle in his look, and yet something of the bulldog, and more than a hint of the characteristic tenacity of both these brutes. But his eyes were sympathetic, intelligent, steady.

"Ahem!"—this from Constable Winch.

"Just a moment," suggested Mr. Marsh, diverting his good-natured gaze to the constable. "You asked me a little while ago if there was anything in it for you if you brought in Mr. Davies. There is. Read Section 299 of the Revised Statutes, making it a felony for a state or county officer to solicit a bribe. That's all."

And Mr. Marsh kept his good-natured gaze on Mr. Winch as the latter, with his cap in his hand, tiptoed out of the room.

It was close on to eight o'clock when Davies left the big man, and by this time Davies knew a number of things—but nothing very much, as he had to admit.

At Mr. Marsh's invitation, they had supped together at the hotel. Mr. Marsh had vouchsafed the information that he was not the inspector Mr. Winch

had believed him to be, but he was the general agent for the district. And there his information about himself had just about come to an end apart from a few general impressions—married, several children, an indifference to food, an appetite for facts.

Davies was the one who furnished the information.

"Turned me wrong-side out," he said, after he had bade Mr. Marsh good night. He spoke to the night: "Turned me wrong-side out!"

And he was a little humiliated, a little sick, very down-spirited. A fine man of the world! A slick customer, forsooth! The events of the day had begun their sure reaction. Yea, bo! He had come all the way back here to the bushes so that the jay-hawkers could batten on him, play him for a rube! Him marry Alvah Morley? Why, he wasn't fit to marry a Chink!

There was a deadly practical side, moreover, to these reflections of his concerning Alvah.

Now that there was no immediate danger of the mortgage being foreclosed on the Flowery Harbor, and a fair chance—call it that—of old Sky-Blue buying the place for some purpose or other, wasn't it so that perhaps Alvah would be better off if he were out of the way? Had he any right to hang around and compromise the girl's future, and take advantage of her innocence and her ignorance of the world, now that she and her uncle were no longer, so to speak, dependent on him?

These broodings became all the more insistent when he arrived at the house and found it deserted. Of course! Every one was around at the Odd Fellows'

Hall. They were all crazy about Sky-Blue. All of them were.

And this was the way of the world.

Here was he himself, Richard Davies. He had come to St. Clair and attempted to lead the honest life. And how had St. Clair treated him? It had knifed him, thrown him down, turned him wrong-side out, done to him as much as New York had ever done to any man, and more.

On the other hand, there was old Sky-Blue, as crooked as a dog's hind leg, thinking of graft and dreaming of graft, working for his own pocket all the time, laughing at those who believed in him, calling them suckers! And how had St. Clair treated *him?* It had gone wild over him, clasped him to its bosom, wept over him, stood ready to give him everything it had!

"The whole world's like that," said Dick.

He let the truth sink in.

"You'd better go down to the river and drown yourself," he said; and he meant it.

But should he?

Wouldn't it be better, after all, if he fell in with old Sky-Blue, accepted the bishop's offer of partnership, resumed for himself the career of graft? Why not? The world wouldn't mind. The world would think all the better of him for it. The world had proved this, not once but a thousand times; not only here in St. Clair, but back in old New York.

He had been walking, he hadn't noticed where; so

engrossed in his bitterness and dejection that he was oblivious to all that was passing about him.

Then, all at once, there came a gust of wind. There followed instantly a blinding flash of lightning right ahead of him, this followed so instantly by a burst of thunder that the double blow blinded and deafened him, almost knocked him from his feet.

As he groped, he saw one of the big maple trees, just ahead of him, sag lopsidedly to a fall, and he knew that he had escaped death by the fraction of a minute.

But no sooner had this concept and its incidental lessons come reeling into his brain before he was deluged with rain—a sheeted downpour—and he was making a jump for an open door. Any port in a storm, and here was a door that was wide open and well-lighted.

He was in the place before he recognized it.

He was in the lobby of the Odd Fellows' Hall, and the doors of the hall itself were open. He could see that the hall was packed, that there were a good many people who had been unable to secure seats. There was a clapping of hands, a ripple of muffled laughter and talk.

Old Sky-Blue never did let his meetings fall into sadness for any length of time. Right on top of some sad story or other he'd crack a joke and have every one wiping away his tears and laughing at the same time. And that was what he was doing now, no doubt.

The dirty old hypocrite! But Davies felt a tug of interest in spite of himself.

And just then there followed a surprise.

One of the volunteer ushers of the place—one of Pro-

fessor Culbertson's devoted young disciples—had seen Davies, had jumped for him.

"They've been holding a place for you," the young man said.

"Who?"

"Every one," he grinned, gladly. "You're wanted up among the professor's friends."

Why not?

Davies braced himself.

He followed the usher around through a side aisle and up through the shimmer and the smell of the crowd and the flickering gas. The convocation began to sing the second verse of a hymn:

"Brighten the corner—where you are!"

And Davies caught a slant of old Sky-Blue smiling down at him with an expression intended to convey doting affection—and perhaps the look, at that, was sincere, Lord pity the old fraud! Also he saw the colonel, up on the platform, filling almost, if not quite, the majesty of his Mobile coat; then, at the colonel's side, Alvah, meditative, but suddenly aware of him, and, at Alvah's side, the vacant chair.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE GUIDING LIGHT

Old Sky-Blue, otherwise Professor Culbertson, had worked the town up to the psychological moment for a grand and glorious harvest. There was no doubt of that. The singing over, there was a long pause, very effective, and then a rippling murmur of breath and clothing, and a number of voices, well distributed throughout the hall, calling for the Chautauqua salute, so that, by the time old Sky-Blue stood up there beaming through his snowy whiskers the whole congregation was a flutter of handkerchiefs. Nor did Sky-Blue try to stop them. Not he! He let them wave and he beamed and beamed.

It was only when he saw that folks were getting a little tired, and that the salute was becoming a little forced, that he raised his arms above his head. And he stood like that for perhaps half a minute—as striking an imitation of a sure-enough prophet as one would care to see anywhere—until the hall was still and silent again.

Not until then were folks permitted to discover how deeply moved he had been all along. He lowered his arms and dug around until he discovered his own hand-

kerchief, and he had to use it for almost another full minute before he was able to control his voice.

Even then his voice was frail and shaky for a time.

"If I was to obey the feelings in my heart," he said. Then he stopped. There was a pitcher of water and a glass tumbler on a small table at his side. He looked at this. He poured a little water into the glass. The crowd watched him with rapt attention while he drank. "If I was to obey the feelings in my heart——"

"Quit your stallin'," said Davies in silence.

He and Alvah were seated very close together. Every one was crowded. The platform was packed. Looking down, Davies saw Alvah's hand close to his own. Some impulse made him extend his little finger. She received it in a smooth grasp. Life wasn't so terrible.

"Oh-h-h!" chanted old Sky-Blue, getting into his stride, "the blessin's of affection. Verily was it writ that an affectionate nature is like unto a well-spring in a thirsty land."

"You said a mouthful, then," smiled Davies.

"Let us extend these blessin's," Culbertson rhapsodized. "Let us make this community a center of affection, where the weary pilgrims along life's dry 'n' dusty highways can quaff a little sweetness ere they lay them down."

And every now and then old Sky-Blue let his brilliant little eyes flicker into Davies's eyes, and Davies could see that the old man was smiling back of his beard.

"You're a skin," said Davies silently.

But Culbertson was rapidly approaching the main object of this particular meeting:

"No, it ain't the moneys, my beloved. A leetle affection and the sign and the symbol thereof as represented by your blessed names on these blanks." He used his handkerchief again. "I will have already gone to the h-h-eavenly shore, but when other eyes 'n mine behold these tokens they will say: 'Oh-h-h, how they loved him! See him! Culbertson! In his white raiment! Lookin' back from the Golden Bank——'"

"It's another bank you're thinkin' about, you old stiff," said Davies in his heart.

"The moneys 'r' comin' from elsewheres, beloved! Pledges from you! Nothin' but pledges! Pledges to seal our love in heaven 'n' to be paid solely 'n love amongst ourselves on earth! For the moneys'll be comin' from the ministers 'n' the college presidents 'n' the captains of industry 'n' the Governors of States 'n' a-a-ll those other leaders in this gr-e-at 'n' gul-orious lan' who've been beggin' fer a share in 'stablishin' the Beating Heart."

The old man gushed words and tears. He was fairly slopping over with sentimentality. And there for a time he almost had Davies himself hypnotized. Davies was conscious of the currents of feeling that were already swirling into the main channel of the bishop's discourse—trickles from unstable hearts and minds.

But he glanced at Alvah, found her radiant and cool.

She had the subtle expression of a girl who looks in one direction with her physical eyes and elsewhere with her mind's eye.

Davies discovered that his hat wasn't properly placed

under his chair; and, by bending low to adjust it, was able to brush Alvah's hand with his lips.

How sensitive were his lips!

There for a second or two all the finely developed, highly evolved sense-organisms of the human race, millions of years old, were merged again into that parent sense which through the ages became specialized into sight and hearing, taste and smell; and this parent sense was concentrated and epitomized in that fraction of lip-tegument which was in contact with Alvah's hand.

It was either less than a kiss or more than a kiss—in the ordinary sense of the word.

For, right there in the crowded hall, with all those other more or less highly evolved human animals herded close about him, and with the gas-jets flickering, and old Sky-Blue mouthing his platitudes, Davies's soul took flight. It was like a flight which had its beginning from the original resting-place of souls—back in the Eözöic abyss where life began; then curved swiftly up and around the mounting spiral through shales and gravels, caves and cabins, pyramids, cathedrals—wherever the ego had groped for its mate; and on beyond all present experience into a higher realm where men and women were garbed more gorgeously than butterflies and lived like gods.

Davies straightened up. To all appearances nothing had happened. But the conviction was singing in his brain that he had passed the crisis of his life.

Besides, the weather had changed. That sharp and terrific thunderstorm had cleared the air. It was still raining, but gently. Even here in the hall the atmo-

sphere was less acrid and sultry. Every now and then from some open window there came in a surge of ozone bringing with it the cool fragrance of wet trees and gardens.

There had been a fairly long hiatus in the bishop's address so far as Davies was concerned—and possibly so far as Alvah also was concerned; but Sky-Blue still harped on the "Song of Songs," mouthing the word, rolling it over and over on his tongue:

"Love!"

"You know a lot about it," said Davies, with fierce but silent irony.

Love and money!

Davies cast a quick glance back over his immediate past.

Was it possible that only a few brief minutes ago he had been harboring the idea of surrendering himself to this vile old man? Better would it have been to have given himself over to that other impulse and to have drowned himself! What had become of his doubts—his weakness—his fears—his bitterness?

Gone!

Love had driven them away. His love! Alvah's love! A love that was infinite!

"Oh, God Almighty!" breathed Davies.

And he was looking at old Sky-Blue again with the knowledge in his heart that here was one who sinned against the Holy Ghost and that it was his, Richard Davies's, duty to destroy him.

CHAPTER XLVII

ARMAGEDDON

But how was he going to do this? He was all alone—all alone except for Alvah—and Alvah was unwarned.

"Just sign fer all you can," old Sky-Blue was intoning gently; "an 'en, when I go out to announce my resolution to the world, I can say: 'Behold! Behold! Of such be the faithful of St. Clair! They didn't do this because of the ten per cent profit—nor the twenty per cent, or thirty per cent. Nay! Nay!' Though verily the profits will wax exceeding great—as I can tell you now, my beloved, they will—fer, lo! it has been granted unto me like a vision, and I saw the marble halls and the gilded domes even as of a new Jerusalem, and lo! the name thereof was the Seminary of the Beating Heart, and lo! I looked again and they that entered in and they that issued forth did wear fine raiment and rode in goodly autos."

"He's leading up to the touch," said Davies in his heart.

It was so.

The bishop was calling up his ushers. One of the first was that preternaturally glad but pale young man who had ushered Davies to the platform. And the

bishop was giving them sheafs of those blank checks which he himself had set up and run off over at the *Messenger* office; also bunches of folders containing his recommendations from the King of Sweden and others —these for any strangers who happened to be present.

And Davies saw, not without a flash of consternation, that in accordance with some prearranged plan the outer doors had been closed so that no one could escape, even should the rain stop.

Then Sky-Blue nodded at the St. Clair Male Quartet, and the quartet banged straight into one of those old revival jingles that anybody can follow, no one can resist:

> "It's the old-time religion,
> It's the old-time 'eligion,
> It's the old-time 'eligion,
> *And* it's good enough fer me!"

It wasn't a dozen seconds before every one was singing it, and a lot of people were stamping their feet as well.

Ushers scattering. Hysteria mounting. Old Sky-Blue waving his arms and shouting a note or two himself.

But in the midst of all this excitment Sky-Blue remained the master of both himself and the situation. He saw a little old woman down in front of the platform. Davies saw her, too. She was not only little and old, but she was manifestly poor—dressed in black, a little old black bonnet on her head, a threadbare dress of black alpaca, manifestly her Sunday clothes.

Sky-Blue read the signal in her devoted eyes. He reached down. Others aiding, he had her on the platform. She was nervous, a little frightened, but borne up by her faith.

She said something that was inaudible to others in the din, but Sky-Blue bent his ear to listen.

He straightened up. He shouted:

"God bless you, sister!"

There was a slight lull in the music and shouting. Sky-Blue bent his ear again, again straightened up and howled:

"Fer all she's got! That's the way to talk! She's signin' fer all she's got!"

He listened again, again proclaimed the tidings:

"Eighty-three dollars!"

Davies felt a glow of white heat in his breast that was almost killing him.

"You dirty old scum!" his mind roared.

But what could he do? Should he rise in his place and shout from his throat what his mind was dictating? This and all the rest? That here was a hypocrite—here was a fraud—here was a robber of the poor?

But old Sky-Blue, with his arm about the humble little sister in black, was singing again. He was laughing. He turned and gave Davies a look as if to say: "I'll show yuh!"

The Pollyanna young man forced his way up to the platform and delivered a verbal message.

And old Sky-Blue, who was dancing a little by this time, did a couple of more jumps and shouted at the top of his lungs and waved his arms for silence.

"No money!" he howled. "No money! Brother Hitchcock here's just been tellin' me how some of you dear ones been offerin' him dimes and quarters. That's all right fer you dear ones that ain't got a bank account, and it's all right fer the blessed little children, and I'm goin' to ask Brother Hitchcock to register these sums so's no tithe ner jitney be unrecorded in the Golden Book. But let those of us who can, put down our names and our pledges."

Here one of the ushers cried out from the back of the hall:

"*Judge Berry's down fer two hundred!*"

There was an outburst of handclapping; but Sky-Blue called for a cheer, and the auditorium rocked.

And the quartet, which had begun on "Old Black Joe," switched to "Dixie," and this also kept the cheering going along for a while—long enough; for now others were trying to get their names into the cheering-line.

"*Mrs. Melva Mellish down fer a hundred!*"

"*Seventy-five for Brother Cole!*"

"*Ed Brock, eighty!*"

With considerable difficulty old Sky-Blue succeeded in getting himself heard again, although he had to shout at first to do it.

"Don't misunderstand," he yelled. "Don't misunderstand! If you can't sign the pledges give what you got! Go to it, boys!"

This last to the quartet.

And the riot broke loose again, ushers working like

sin, sporadic cheers drowning the music, this brother and that brother or Sister So-and-So, who hadn't spoken to each other for years, perhaps, now shaking hands and singing in unison and smiling at each other through their tears.

Davies's agony increased.

Was he going to let Sky-Blue get away with this—rob the whole town?

"Look out! Look out!" he wanted to yell. "Those are checks that you're signing. Checks, you rubes! He's going to cash 'em! He's told me so! He's a fake!"

What if he should yell this? Would they believe him? Would Alvah think he was crazy.

Sky-Blue waltzed over and stroked his shoulder.

It was at that moment that Davies felt his blood stand still in his veins; felt the slow, cringing contraction of his muscles as he started to rise. The time had come. The bell of fate had begun to ring. He couldn't stand this. If he did he would be as bad as the bishop. And worse! For perhaps the bishop didn't know any better.

It seemed to Davies that he could already feel the people looking at him; feel the multitudinous focus of the thousand eyes, although as yet he hadn't moved an inch.

Then he was suddenly aware that it wasn't at himself the people looked, but at Colonel Evan Williams.

The colonel himself had risen, was waiting to make himself heard.

CHAPTER XLVIII

"THIS IS MY FRIEND"

Old Sky-Blue righted himself and bawled:

"Brother Williams! Let us listen to Brother Williams!"

And there was just the barest suggestion—for Davies there was, at least—just the barest suggestion that the bishop was nervous; up against something that he wasn't perfectly sure about.

And there was that in the colonel's appearance to give any one pause, especially if that person happened to have a troubled conscience or any reason for such. The colonel was calm. He was self-possessed. And yet, also, he was somewhat out of himself and above himself—filling his Mobile coat perfectly, looking as he might have looked twenty or thirty years ago, except for his white hair and mustache, eye sagacious, florid, handsome.

Alvah was gazing at him. So was Davies. So gradually was every one else as the hall went silent.

"My friends," said Colonel Williams, "I feel that I cannot let this occasion pass without giving my testimony."

His voice was soft, yet vibrant, sonorous. It carried.

Old Sky-Blue had subsided into the chair the colonel had vacated, he having seated the little old woman in black in his own armchair—which was too big for her; and Sky-Blue sat there with a happy smile on his face, wondering what was coming off, and now and then patting Alvah's hand to show every one how happy he was and how his heart was overflowing with love.

"Testimony in the old religious sense," the colonel said. "Testimony as we used it in the revivals of our Old South! This, although the evidence is in, although the judgment be already recorded by the Judge on High! We've all been witnesses. We've witnessed once more the ancient miracle of Grace."

Sky-Blue was still a trifle up in the air, as the saying is; but he was game. He clapped his hands and said: "Amen!" And this started a flutter of applause.

The colonel turned and took a leisurely look at Sky-Blue.

"What's comin' off?" Davies demanded of his soul.

The colonel said:

"Thanks to you, sir!"

He turned once more to face the audience, his voice thrilled:

"Thanks to him! Thanks to the rare spirit and bold of him to whom we have listened with such reverence in this hall, our friend, our benefactor, our saintly leader, the Rev. Dr. Culbertson!"

The applause started up again. It did this almost where it had left off, with much handclapping and some cries of "Amen" and "True! True!" But it gave a sudden jump and was twice as loud, twice as vociferous

—cries of "Good for the colonel!" "Hallelujah!" "'Ray for Dr. Culbertson!" Then it gave yet another jump and became a baby ovation.

"He's makin' it worse," said Davies to himself, and it was just as if a fist was pounding at his chest.

Sky-Blue was satisfied now. He waved an arm as a signal for the crowd to let the colonel continue. The colonel was watching the crowd, however, with all the ready strategy of the trained orator. He waited until the silence was practically complete, then intense, absolute. He adapted his voice to the silence, spoke softly:

"Gratitude is greatest when it is personal. Out of the full heart I speak. You are my neighbors. You have been patient. You have seen me fall. You have seen the forces of destruction cloud my sky like hungry eagles. But where are the eagles now? Gone! Gone! Thank God the sky is clear again."

"*God* bless you, brother," droned the bishop.

And there were a few other cries, slightly hysterical: "Hallelujah!" "Praise the Lord!"

"Cut it out," Davies implored in his heart. "You don't know what you're doing."

But the colonel had all the appearance of one who does know what he is about.

He roared the next few words:

"Am I alone?"

Cries of "No! No!" and some laughter.

"Am I alone?" the colonel demanded again. "In the regeneration of my unworthy self we have seen but the passing shadow of the greater fact, the regeneration of our city. St. Clair! As he himself so eloquently has

put it, thou art already a well-spring in the desert, St. Clair! Beautiful thou wert! Yea, more beautiful than any other city in the State of equal population!"

More applause.

"Think then what it will be when this dream of our doctor is realized, home of an institution unique in the annals of the world, the visible promise of that city of the new Jerusalem—prepared as a bride adorned for her husband—her light like unto a stone most precious —and filled with the glory and the honor of the nations."

All the time that the colonel was speaking the ushers were on the job of getting fresh subscriptions. Even in those moments of tense silence their eyes were alert. At each outburst of applause they were seizing the occasion to convert the enthusiasm into something tangible.

Davies's distress grew.

By degrees the congregation was fusing into an even greater degree of fervor than it had shown when old Sky-Blue himself was holding forth. It was coming along toward ecstasy as the colonel swung into his peroration, a personal tribute to Culbertson, but couched in the language of the Wise One:

"'His mouth is most sweet: Yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!'"

And then, in the midst of the cheering and handclapping and incipient song, old Sky-Blue jumped forward with streaming eyes and clasped the colonel in his arms and called for a song. But while he was doing all this he still had sufficient presence of mind to shout:

"Sign your pledges, friends! Er give what you can! Let us make this day a day of glory!"

The quartet had taken its cue from the colonel's speech, was shooting out the chorus of that other revival song:

"Oh, I'll meet you in the city of the new Jerooz-olum!"

It became a roar as the congregation joined in. The ushers were now working like mad, taking money and checks. An old farmer had clambered to the platform. He and Sky-Blue had to howl at each other to make themselves heard.

"*I want to go down for fifty dollars!*"

"*Did you say eighty?*"

"*But I ain't got a pen.*"

"*Use mine.*"

And Davies saw the bishop thrust his fountain pen smoothly into the old man's hand. Davies was in a riot of emotion. He didn't know what to do. The colonel's speech had made matters worse, a hundred times worse. What sort of a chance did he have to denounce the bishop now? Would it all wind up by his being forced to murder the bishop? Would such a murder be justified?

Alvah looked at him. She was radiant.

It couldn't have been Alvah's thought, therefore, that came to him—came to him like a flash of inspiration, of that rarer thing called illumination; but it was something which came to him from the girl's purity and innocence none the less; that perception, once vague, now clear, that old Sky-Blue was evil, was Satan.

Should he falter in the presence of this Prince of Darkness—lie down before him—when he alone of all the others there was armed to destroy him utterly?

Once more he trembled to the rise.

But now, as that other time, Colonel Evan Williams intervened. The colonel had called for order, commanded silence.

"I wish to put a motion," the colonel shouted.

Culbertson was supporting him—doing this right heartily now that he was certain of the colonel's motives.

Davies didn't get all that followed. All that he could see, all that he could think about was that the town was stripping itself, signing pledges, each pledge a personal check to Culbertson, otherwise Sky-Blue, to say nothing of all the actual cash that was rolling in.

He barely heard what the colonel was saying about Dr. Culbertson being advanced in years; that he should therefore be relieved of wearisome detail.

Then he got it: his own name.

The colonel had spoken about that other and younger friend of his whom the whole town was glad to honor.

"*Mr. Richard Davies!*"

And there was plenty of applause at that as well.

And then the colonel was calling upon them to elect him by acclamation—elect him by a rising vote—which the congregation did, surging up to its feet before the question was fairly put; elect Mr. Richard Davies, secretary and treasurer, and custodian of all the funds, of the Beating Heart Seminary.

Davies heard all this a good deal as if he were in a trance. He was in a trance. He was until old Sky-Blue himself was falling upon him, calling him by name:

"Oh, my beloved Richard!"

CHAPTER XLIX

FACE TO FACE

"LET the old man rave!" he communed with himself. "I've got him! I've got him!"

Sky-Blue whispered:

"Pretty slick! You put it over great!"

But it was as if another whisper came to Davies:

"*You prayed in your heart. Your prayer is answered. You called for help. You've got it.*"

All this, while Sky-Blue was still cavorting about him —patting him on the shoulder, shouting out his joy and his felicitations. Verily, verily, was virtue its own reward.

"Begin it now," said Richard.

"What?" Sky-Blue asked.

"Pass it over—the check the old farmer gave you."

"Yea! Yea!" shouted the bishop. "All pledges and moneys to Brother Davies!" And he passed over the paper Davies had mentioned.

The ushers crowded in.

Davies bade a swift good night to Alvah. She glowed at him with love and admiration—a look that he was never to forget. He squeezed Colonel William's hand. Their eyes met. Did the colonel suspect what had come to pass? Had he foreseen it, engineered it?

But the crowd was flowing strong by this time—others crowding up to congratulate him, to pass over their checks and money. He disposed of the water-jug and the glass. The wealth piled up and covered the table-top—St. Clair's donation to the Beating Heart.

It was a long, long time before the hall was emptied. It wouldn't have been emptied at all, perhaps—not before morning—if old Sky-Blue hadn't taken to shooing his well-wishers out into the night. He had to shepherd them out, establishing himself down near the door, where he could bless them and get rid of them at the same time.

Sky-Blue was moist and tremulous. Any one could have told that this was indeed—just as he said it was—the most beautiful day of his life.

He called a good many of the sisters by their first names. He kissed a good many of the girl children—did this fondly and with tears in his eyes—especially when the ages of these shaded up around eighteen.

"Is this little Effie?"

And little Effie blushing, forsooth, with all the warmth of her hundred and fifty pounds of corn-fed, buxom health.

"God bless you, sister. Did you get a receipt?"

Davies was grateful for the delay. He had his work cut out for him, and he didn't want to be interfered with for a while.

In spite of the bishop's expressed preference for checks instead of cash—thus insuring a vastly greater donation doubtless than could have been yielded by any ordinary collection—still there was cash galore—

pounds and pounds of it, chiefly in pennies and nickels and dimes; yet with a fair weight, also, of fifty-cent pieces and silver dollars. All this had to be counted.

An awful job!

Not only counted, but made to balance with the penciled memoranda turned in by the various ushers.

But he was something of the natural cashier. He went about the task with something of the neatness that characterized his dress, the speed that was such an asset in a fight. And this was a fight. He separated the coins and stacked them. This was a poker-game, and he was stacking his chips. He arranged the paper and the checks, folding each one of them lengthwise and getting them perfectly even, as he had seen the big bookmakers in times past prepare their rolls at the track.

The amount ran into the thousands—those pledges as good as cash, each pledge a personal check to Sky-Blue—Balaam N. Culbertson—payable by the local bank.

He had plenty of time.

He knew that he was going to have plenty of time. He worked with the knowledge that he had something or some one now on his side. He had no nerves; he was cool, perfectly confident.

He stowed the stuff away with method and care—bills in this pocket, checks in this. He had a large, clean, linen handkerchief. He put the coin into this and knotted it up, then hid it where he could have it safe and not be embarrassed by its weight. For, while he was confident, there was no telling what might happen.

So the town had elected him secretary and treasurer and custodian of funds! Had elected him by acclamation! This when he had believed the whole world to be against him!

He looked up finally to see the bishop in the act of shooing the last of his beloved out of the door. At last no one remained but the janitor. The janitor also Sky-Blue embraced. He had the man turn out all the lights except that of the reading-lamp on the platform. Then Sky-Blue dismissed this brother with a blessing, told him that he and Richard would tarry for a while, and would see that everything was closed up properly when they left.

So Sky-Blue eventually saw the janitor through the door also, and locked the door behind him.

Then Sky-Blue came striding up the aisle, delighted but very important, rubbing his hands and inclined to lord it over Davies in a friendly sort of way.

"We've done it!" he exclaimed. "We've done it! Damn my white hairs if we ain't done it this time! Done it right! Did you get the applause! Oh, Chick! Let this learn you! Old Sky-Blue ain't such a has-been as you thought he was! Is he? What are the figgers?"

Davies told him.

Sky-Blue rolled his eyes heavenward, brought his fingers into contact over his stomach and twirled his thumbs. But he didn't hold the tableau long. Suddenly he was all nervousness and greed.

"Fork it over," he said. "Fork it over, so's I can fondle it."

He noticed the expression in Davies's face—saw something there that he didn't comprehend, didn't quite like.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Richard dryly. "Nothing—yet!"

"Oh, now, look here," the bishop ejaculated. "Don't go and spoil an occasion like this by a case of sulks. Don't, Chicky, I beg of you. Why, I'm as proud of you as I can be. You did your part noble—if you do know it yourself," he teased. "Seriously, my boy, your work to-night's confirmed everything I've ever thought of you, planned fer you. It was a surprise to old Sky-Blue himself. It was. I confess that, there for a moment, I was gettin' a little leary. It was too good. It was comin' too easy. I've seen it happen before. It's just at such times as this that somebody begins to suspect—spills the beans—some rube lawyer, some jay banker er country cop."

"That's right," said Dick dryly, with his eyes on the old man.

The bishop was convulsed with reminiscent laughter.

"And you had me guessin'. You did. When the old colonel got up and began his spiel I could 'a' beaned him. 'Drat his old soul,' I says; 'may he drop down dead,' I says. And here he was leadin' right up to the gran'-stan' play 'at pulled the wool over all of their eyes." He put these pleasantries behind him. "Well," he said, "now fer the big split. Le's begin with the cash. Where is it? Where'd you put it?"

He had begun to rub his hands again. He was in a tremor of eagerness and greed.

"I got it," said Dick.

"I know you got it. Hurry up. Come across."

Davies eyed the bishop. Davies had gone a little white, but he was very cool, steady. He measured his words.

"I'm not going to come across," he announced. "You're not in on this. You don't get a bean."

CHAPTER L

SKIN FOR SKIN

"I DON'T quite get you," said the bishop. "I appear to be a little deef. Say that again."

"You heard me."

"Methinks you was crackin' a joke."

His words were jocular; not so the tone of his voice.

"I was cracking no joke," said Richard. "I meant what I said, and I'll tell you again: you don't get a cent of this money. It isn't yours. It belongs to the people who shelled it out. They've entrusted it to my care. And I'm going to care for it. Is that clear?"

"So that's your game!"

"There is no game about it."

"Can it!" barked the bishop.

"I was as much surprised as any one when the colonel sprang that nomination."

"Fork out that chink."

"And maybe the colonel isn't such a fool as you seem to take him to be. He was a fine lawyer in his day."

The bishop was occupied in drawing up a chair. He was doing this with nervous haste.

"Damn the colonel," he muttered over his shoulder.

"But Chicky," said the old man, "I wasn't tryin' to hornswaggle you. Hain't I said all along we were splitting fifty fifty?"

But when he had fully turned and was seated, and his eyes met Davies's eyes, all those preliminary misgivings and hatreds aroused by what he had originally seen in Davies's face must have returned to him quadrupled. It steadied him—like the old war-horse that he was on the eve of battle. He took a chew of tobacco.

"Maybe the colonel had the situation sized up better than you think," said Davies, speaking steadily. "You've talked all along about me having so much to learn. Maybe I'm not the only one. Maybe you've got something to learn yourself."

The bishop forked his beard and looked around for a receptacle. Not discovering any, he arose and stalked very solemnly over to a back window which was open—all this merely to give him time to think. But Davies watched him narrowly. He saw the old man let his hand rest for a moment on an iron weight that was there to hold one of the inside shutters in place. He saw the bishop's furtive glance. The bishop came back unarmed.

"I'm talking straight," Davies announced somberly.

The bishop thought he saw a lead.

"But Chicky," he said; "I wasn't tryin' to hornswaggle you. So help me God! Hain't I said all along we were splittin' fifty-fifty?"

"Yes!"

"Well, then, what you stallin' for? Come across! Give me a feel."

"You don't get a feel," said Davies; "nor a smell!"

The bishop's face underwent a terrible change. It was just as if he had been griped by the first spasm of some frightful pain—something that killed the good in him and showed him up black and horrible.

He emitted a blasphemous epithet, smooth but barbed.

Then he got his reason back.

"Still foolin'," he gurgled.

"Yes," said Davies; "I am not!"

"Sort of tryin' me out!"

"I've tried you out," said Davies. "This is where you get off. You're canned. You're leaving town."

The old man's distress was such, there for a while, that Davies expected to see him collapse utterly. He did collapse to some extent—exactly like a prize-fighter who has received a jolt on the solar-plexus. His face went ashen. He looked a little cross-eyed. His condition was such that Davies felt sorry for him.

"You oughtn't to take it so hard," he said. "You're getting old, bishop. Why don't you straighten up before you die? You don't want to go to hell. No man does. Just see what a good impression you've made on the people of this town! Isn't that worth something? Don't you value their esteem?"

The bishop tried to speak, but he was still paralyzed.

"Why," Davies continued, "there's nothing in the world equal to a good reputation—to having a lot of friends—to having folks look up to you, honor you, love you. When I said that you had a lot to learn I didn't mean anything bad. You've got brains.

You're one of the brainiest men I ever stacked up against. Honest! And you have a heart, too. You're not one of these ordinary crooks like they pinch or send to the chair. I bet you never killed any one in your life, unless you had to. I thought a lot of you the very first night I ever saw you."

The bishop partly recovered. He put a feeble hand into the breast-pocket of his frock-coat and brought out two badly worn documents of legal aspect.

"I done this for you," he murmured.

It was always a sign that his emotion was genuine when he slipped up on his English.

Davies took the documents and examined them, but he wasn't sufficiently used to such things to make out the nature of them right away. Sky-Blue, perceiving this, enlightened him:

"Mortgages!"

"What on?"

"The colonel's property."

"Where did you get them?"

"Tine."

"Frank Tine!"

"Blackmailed him," said the bishop weakly.

"You scared him so he's jumped the town," said Davies.

"Made him surrender the mortgages to me—was going to hand 'em over to the colonel as canceled."

Davies had a moment of indecision, and Sky-Blue profited by this to recover the documents. He was beginning to be himself again. The blood was returning to his face and, doubtless, to his brain.

"But I won't," he said, "if you don't play square. I'll make the colonel and that niece of his wish to God Frank Tine still had these mortgages. That's what I'll do. I ain't going to let him and you double-cross me like an old sucker. You can bet your sweet, young life I ain't."

"The colonel hasn't got anything to do with this," said Davies.

"Bah!"

"He thinks as much of you as he does of me."

"He'll think a damn sight less of you when I get through with you. Are you still nursin' the idea you can hog this money for yourself?"

"I wasn't aiming to hog it for myself."

"What then?"

"I'm going to give it back."

"What?"

"Just what I said. I'm going to turn back both the cash and the checks—as far as possible—to the people who gave them."

"Oh, you are!"

"Yes."

"Well, you just keep your mouth shut and your ears open for a minute while I tell you somethin'. You try it. You just try it! I've been mighty patient with you. I've stood an awful lot of your sass and your brass. You thought you was cute, didn't you? Didn't know you was makin' a monkey of yourself? Shut up! I'm talkin'."

CHAPTER LI

TOOTH AND CLAW

DAVIES made a move to rise, but Sky-Blue delivered himself of such a murderous supplication that Davies kept his place. There was momentary silence, deep, broken only by the slow drip of water from the trees and the *chirr* of crickets.

"I'll give you another chance," said the bishop. His voice was terrible—throaty, not very loud, yet taking a lot of breath, like the purring hiss of a puff-adder or an alligator. "I'll give you another chance. But this will be an end of the foolin', you rat. What are you grinnin' about? I'll make you grin. You'll grin out of the other side of your face when I throw you in. Once more, come across!"

Davies never moved. He merely looked with all his eyes. But he was alert, watchful, just about ready to go.

"You won't?"

"No."

"You won't, won't you? You'll look slick in your college clothes—doin' the lock-step. It'll be the wolves fer you. I'll frame you—hidin' here in the country. The New York bulls won't do a thing to you when they get their hooks on you. I'll hang enough

crimes on you to send you away for life. Damn you, I'll send you to the chair fer killin' a cop."

Davies must have known that these were not idle threats. In the world he came from many a man—many a boy—was believed to have disappeared beyond the doors of Elmira, Auburn, Sing Sing, on a trumped-up charge, "railroaded," convicted of another man's crime, the victim of perjured testimony and a private vengeance. And if any one could work such a vengeance Sky-Blue could, with his cunning, his place of power in the underworld.

But, curiously, Davies felt no fear—felt only a keen excitement, a species of elation. It was as if he were conscious of that power that had already come to his aid—conscious that the power was still there ready to back him up again.

He did smile. It was a smile that was chiefly located though in his glowing eyes.

"You throw me to the wolves?" he said. "Maybe you will! But if you do you'll go with me, and it'll be with a fang in every string of your meat. Now you shut up. You've had your say. Why, you dirty old man! Taking money from poor old women dressed in black! Spewing your guff about love and religion! I could take these two hands and jerk your whiskers out! Tear you to pieces like a rotten rag! And you got the nerve to sit there and talk about railroading me? I'm only sparing you because you're old, and because you're licked, and because you're up against something that even now you can't understand."

Sky-Blue had a movement—not very much of a movement, but desperate—to regain the ascendency.

It was hopeless.

Davies arose from his chair like one moved by a force not his own. He stood over Sky-Blue and looked down at him. And the bishop looked up at Davies. The bishop's mouth was open. He appeared not to breathe.

"You're canned," said Davies. "You're going out of town. I told you once. I tell you again. I'm letting you go. You ought to go on a rail, in your skin, and your skin dolled up with tar and feathers. That's what would happen to you if I put the town wise. Culbertson! Balaam N. Culbertson! Founder of the Beating Heart! How old are you?"

"Seventy!"

"God pity you!"

"Chick!" It was a whisper.

"No more 'Chick!'" said Davies without passion. "Chick's dead. Remember that when you get back to New York. You won't hurt me. You can't. No man can. I've got a hold of something I can cling to. Influence! I've got a friend."

There was a quality about him while he stood there and while he was saying this that seemed to be taking all the strength and hostility right out of Sky-Blue—bleeding him, leaving him increasingly weak and helpless. He was still rigid—the bishop was—but he was impotent. Still, he attempted another threat:

"You'll—be sorry!"

But it sounded childish. It was futile.

"There are three trains going out of St. Clair to-morrow," said Davies, transferring his thought to the subject with a mental effort. "The first is that milk-train that leaves at four-ten. You don't want to take that. You're tired. You want a little sleep—a little time to think things over. There's that other slow one—the local—to-morrow afternoon. I don't think you'd better wait for that. I'm going to get busy on this new job of mine to-morrow. Things might happen. I guess you'd better take the mail-train in the morning, eight-forty-five. Is it understood?"

"I'll—take it."

"And you think I'll still be sorry?"

Sky-Blue merely wagged his head.

"Sorry!" Davies breathed. "Let me tell you something. I'm going home to-night for the first good sleep I've had since you showed up—going home without a load on my heart—going to hit the hay in peace. You needn't stick around to say good-by. I'll be getting up a little late. You'll be gone when I wake up. Go on and beat it! You need the rest."

He kept his eye on Sky-Blue as Sky-Blue got to his feet. For a moment or so the bishop stood there as if he expected to say something. He finally turned, however, and made his way, Davies still watching him, down the aisle, through the door, out into the night.

Davies, taking his time about it, recovered his improvised bag of coin from where he had hidden it. He turned out the light of the reading-lamp. He also started to leave.

But midway through the darkened auditorium he

stopped—stopped short, lifted his face, looked as a man looks who suddenly finds himself in the presence of something great and unfamiliar.

So it was with him.

This flimsy hall had become a temple. The outer doors were open, and through the broad casement of them the night came in, soft, and mysterious, and holy. The place had become like a temple of Egypt, and what had just happened there become a rite—one of those rites of magic and wonder which have marked the recurrent dawns of the world after periods of darkness.

After that, Davies walked more slowly.

He came down to the sill of his temple, and he stood there as a priest might have done. There was an elation and a gratitude about him that made him shine, and which was neither of his body nor his mind, but of his spirit, flooding outward from the center of his being and transmuting him into a perfect harmony with the night and all the elements thereof—the damp, the perfume, the purple depths, the tender brilliance of the newly shining stars.

That was right.

There was nothing that could hurt him now.

He betook himself along the paths to the Flowery Harbor—looking up, as Alvah had told him to do. But the way seemed neither long nor dark nor lonely.

Only he did recognize that something had been lacking—some complete fulfilment—when he came within sight of his destination and saw that some one had

put a light in the window. Alvah! And he knew that she had been waiting up for him.

He quickened his steps.

He saw her pale form hovering at the gate.

CHAPTER LII

THE RETURN OF THE SHADE

She said something about having been worried about him. But she was still under the influence of the excitement and the enthusiasm she had brought back with her from the meeting. But all her emotion was for him. She thought it was wonderful. She thought that everything was wonderful—and Davies was inclined to agree with her.

"Where's Dr. Culbertson?" she asked.

"I thought he had come home," said Davies.

"No."

"Then he's just walking around," said Davies. "Thinking! All men have moments when they feel like thinking."

This answer seemed to satisfy Alvah. Anyway, it was apparent that her thought could not easily remain away for any length of time from Davies and all that concerned him.

"Are you sleepy?" he asked.

"I feel as if I could never sleep again."

"I'm not sleepy either," he said. "Come on around to the pump. I want to wash the feel of all this money from my hands. I'll let you pump for me."

"What a lot of it!" she exclaimed, as she took his

handkerchief-bundle from him. "Weren't you afraid of being robbed?"

"A little afraid, at first," he confessed. "Now pump!"

She brought him a towel from the back porch.

"And why not afterward?" she inquired.

"That's a complicated story," he replied.

He brought his clean hands to either side of her finely modeled head. He drew her gently toward him.

"Tell it to me," she whispered, unafraid.

There is probably a basis in fact for all those old stories of fairycraft. There is, if all old gardens, weedy and decrepit in the daytime, can undergo such a transformation at night as the garden of the Flowery Harbor underwent this night. It became a place of beauty and majesty—a place of broad acres, filled with byways and avenues of mystery, lawns and parterres, pergolas and marble seats. The fountain played. There were nightingales.

"How much do you love me?" Dick whispered.

"More—more—more yet than anything I can think of to say," Alvah replied; and he was aware that this was so, although she had brought that fine brain of hers to the task of answering him truthfully.

They swayed lightly together in the glamouring dusk—did this like two young vine-tendrils in a breeze. He touched her closed eyes with his lips, brought his lips lightly to hers—and it was then that he knew there were nightingales in the land in spite of science. Also, he could hear the fountain play—although by daylight the fountain was dusty dry.

After walking many miles—or so at least it seemed to them—and each of these miles set to music, carpeted with violets—they found the bench that Davies himself had installed in the garden, manifestly for this particular occasion, although he hadn't thought of it at the time.

"And now I'm going to tell you," said Davies.

"What are you going to tell me?"

"That complicated story."

He was filled with a noble valiancy. No other word will serve.

They were still there an hour or so later when they saw a dark shadow which they knew to be the earthly presence of the illustrious Culbertson—"Culbertson, of London, England." The shadow came through the gate, passed slowly up the path. It was the shadow of an old man full of years and trouble.

"Shall we speak to him?" Alvah said.

"I think not," Dick replied.

They heard the front door open and close. There was an added touch of darkness, swift and deft, and that was the great one putting out the light, no doubt.

"How thoughtful you are," said Alvah, after a long interval.

"Why?"

"I should have disturbed him."

"Who?"

"The dear old professor."

"That's right."

"He was meditating—meditating on the wonderful things that happened to-night."

"Right again."

"And praying—praying for the whole world to be good and kind."

Davies swung her lightly backward in his arms. He looked down into her face—looked a long, long time. But he had no word to say; no word, that is, which could be considered germane to the immediate conversation.

As a matter of fact, old Sky-Blue had been letting himself go in meditation. He was still meditating when the sun came up.

He required little sleep, anyway; but even if this hadn't been the nature of him, still his brain most likely would have kept on scampering around—testing the wires, scratching at the planks, gnawing, prying, with the insatiable unrest and curiosity of a ferret in a cage.

His brain also was taking in something that it could not solve.

What was this old Chicky up to, anyway? What was the colonel up to? What was this game of theirs? Why hadn't Chick come across for a fifty-fifty split when it was dead certain that they couldn't do better than that if they didn't have him, Culbertson, there to help them? Anyway, what could Chick mean by throwing him over—with his long record of success—for a pal like Colonel Williams when, as every one knew,

the colonel had allowed himself to be robbed since time out of mind?

Aha! Maybe that was it! Maybe Chick wanted a pal who would be easy! And yet, this hypothesis didn't solve the riddle either.

Why should Chick be so sure of himself in this matter of chasing him, Culbertson, out of town?

It was characteristic that Sky-Blue's attitude toward this part of the enigma was one neither of anger nor of injured pride. It was merely one more angle to the riddle—that was all—an intellectual problem.

Now, now, now!

What could Chicky and the colonel be up to?

They were smart. They were clever. He gave them credit for that. They had let him go on and on and play their game for them right on up to the moment of the big getaway. Then they had stepped in and given him the double-cross.

"And that," said Sky-Blue to himself, "was something I never expected to get handed to me. Nope! In all the years I've been handin' it to others this is the first time any one ever done me a job like that."

He padded over to his grip and got out a fresh package of fine-cut. With this he solaced himself, took a fresh grip on the problem. He eased his clothes, took off his socks.

Well, he was ready to admit that they were a pair of deep ones—either that, or a pair of monumental fools. No; not fools. The bishop knew men. Chick was no fool. And neither was the colonel. If the colonel was a fool the colonel would have gummed things

when it came to swinging in Chicky as custodian of the funds. That was genius.

The bishop sat there by the open window of his room and nourished his indefatigable brain with repeated administrations of fine-cut tobacco—while the darkness melted, and the world turned heliotrope and pink, and the waking birds chirped and trilled, and a morning zephyr threw back the covers of dew and perfume from the flowers, and a few little rosy clouds went dancing out of sight, naked but prettily modest; he sat there in the presence of this pageant and schemed and studied and softly swore and tried again to fathom the mystery of Chick and the colonel, but especially of Chick.

What had spoiled the boy?

Once the best, and the cleanest, and the soberest, and the least-likely-to-be-nabbed pickpocket in New York, and now out here in this jerk-water village.

Was it the girl?

Sky-Blue believed not. True, he had seen more than one bright, young man ruin himself for the sake of a skirt. But Chick had never been that kind. He had studied the lad from a distance, kept track of him as he would have kept track of a son.

And, just then, while he was thinking of Alvah, he heard various soft sounds from the back of the house that told him the girl was astir.

Maybe she was in this game. But he believed not. He recalled how she had been a little cold to him at first, had thawed to him only gradually. She wasn't the emotional sort. But she was the kind who when

once put stays put. Anyway, it wouldn't hurt him to find out.

Alvah, with the kitchen fire just fairly started, looked up to see Professor Culbertson standing in the door.

CHAPTER LIII

THE LAST BELIEVER

"Oh, good morning!" she cried. "I hope that I didn't wake you up. I think the others are still sleeping."

"She ain't wise to nothing," said the bishop in his heart.

He spoke up with the air of a sufferer.

"Alvah!"

"Yes?"

"Alvah! Give me a mouthful of coffee."

"Is there anything I have in the world I wouldn't give you?" Alvah cried with unmistakable generosity.

"She's like Molly, my second wife," the bishop communed with himself. "Couldn't learn her to lie in a thousand years. Good though! Good in her way!"

He accepted Alvah's pleasant invitation that he take his coffee here in the kitchen with her instead of waiting for it in the lonely dining-room. And presently she had served him on the kitchen table, she sitting opposite him and devouring him with affectionate eyes.

"I've so been wanting to speak to you alone," she said, after a while.

"Now it's comin'," said Sky-Blue to himself.

But it wasn't—nothing that he expected.

"I've felt so grateful to you," she said. "You've

been such a wonderful influence in my life, and the lives of all of us—uncle's, and—and Richard's—not to speak of all St. Clair."

Her voice was so warm, her cheek so sympathetic, here eyes so moist, that Sky-Blue played up to her.

"Dear child!"

She refilled the cup he held out to her with a trembling hand. He noticed, as a younger man might have noticed such things, the pretty, pink dress she had on, the velvet tan of her bare forearms, the creamy warmth and smoothness of her throat. But with an older perception he also noticed how good the coffee was, how fresh the butter, how good her home-made bread.

It made him sigh aloud.

"You're not suffering!" she cried.

"A little rheumatism."

"You shouldn't have stayed out so late." She blushed. "We saw you come in."

"We?"

"Richard and I. We were in the garden. I wanted to speak to you, but—Richard wouldn't let me. He's so thoughtful!"

"My child," said the bishop in his heart, "you are spoofing me." Aloud he said: "Oh, yes! No one will ever accuse Richard of not being thoughtful."

Alvah stepped over lightly to the stove where the kettle was sputtering. She moved it back. She made such a picture of domestic beauty standing there—slender, efficient, a little flushed with the heat, that Sky-Blue again thought of his vanished Molly. Where

was she now? Kalamazoo, the last time he had heard of her; and still living single. Was the time coming when he'd be willing to go back into double harness again? Molly would take him back. She was that kind. Maybe he'd look her up—if his luck didn't change.

"What was you saying?" he inquired.

"I'm almost ashamed to tell you how late we did stay out there."

"I'm an old, old man," he assured her.

"I think you're wonderful. I don't mind telling you—oh, I must tell you. I want to tell you everything."

"For God's sake do," Sky-Blue recited in his brain. He spoke aloud. "Yes, yes! If it's something about Richard, you can speak to me openly. I love the boy."

His voice shook. He saw that he was on the right track. So he let his voice shake yet more, and he even managed a little moisture in his own eyes. He repeated:

"I love the boy."

"You guessed——"

"Say on!"

"That I love him too."

"Piffle," the bishop said to himself. "Dear child," he droned.

"It was something that he told me."

"O-ho!" in silence. "Alvah, pass me the butter. You know you can talk right out to me. My sweet little granddaughters always do."

"You have granddaughters?"

"Seven," the bishop lied. "Go on! What did Dicky say?"

"Something terrible."

"A-about me?"

"Of course not. About himself!"

"Oh!"

"He told me—no, I can't!"

If this kept up she could never keep back her tears.

"Bring your chair around here," he coaxed, "and set here beside me. Dear child! Sweet child!"

And she had no sooner done so than he had his arm about her shoulders and was stroking her head, the while he looked skyward with a satisfied air.

"He told me," Alvah whispered, "that he had led a terrible life in New York—had been brought up to steal things ever since he was a little boy—and that an old man had spoken to him—opened his eyes—made him yearn to lead a good life, and a clean life, be born again, as the Bible says."

There was more of it.

"Did—did Dicky say—who the old man was?" Sky-Blue inquired with his shaky voice as he smiled at the ceiling.

"You, Professor Culbertson?"

"Yes, yes! It was me."

"Then it was true!"

The bishop began to play the game as he saw it now. He had noticed the clock. He had only forty-five minutes to spare if he was to catch the mail-train, and that he had decided to do.

"Oh," he said. "You mean it was true about him hookin' things. Tut! Tut! He may have stolen a few marbles from some little playmate, or a banana from a push-cart—though I doubt it. I doubt it. He always was a sensitive child—overreligious—calling it murder if he killed a fly."

"But he said——"

"I know! I know! Told me the same thing! Romantic! Great imagination! Why, child, I carried him in these arms when he was baptized. I watched him grow up—the dreamy, poetical child—dressed in black velvet—lace collars and cuffs——"

"He told me they had been so poor!" exclaimed Alvah.

"Well, yes! Compared to the Carnegies and Rockefellers I suppose you would call 'em that. But one of the finest old families in New York—brass knocker on the door, old furniture, old servants. Lost it, though, in the grea-a-at panic ten or 'leven years ago, and there for a while Richard supported his parents—kept on till they died."

Alvah was moved to tears—happy tears, wistful tears; but she said that she wouldn't have minded it anyway, even if the story were true, only, only, and so on.

"Why, I remember when he was in our Sunday-school," old Sky-Blue resumed. But he broke off: "By crickety, I almost forgot——"

"What?"

"I have to leave on the eight forty-five."

"Going away?"

"Only fer a day 'r two." They were both on their feet. He began patting his pockets. "Now, where did I put it?" He looked at her blankly. "Have you seen my purse? Bank ain't open. Don't need much. But—will the railroad trust me, do you suppose?"

"You old dear," Alvah laughed. "Let me lend you what I have."

She was off. She was back again.

"It's only seventeen dollars," she said. "Seventeen dollars and thirty-five cents. I've been saving——" She blushed.

"Well, well!" he said, as he took the money. "Let Santa Claus try to make it grow fer you."

CHAPTER LIV

THE DAWN OF GLORY

THE day when old Sky-Blue, otherwise the bishop, otherwise "Professor Culbertson, the illustrious, of London, England," disappeared from St. Clair was to remain always one of the most notable in Richard Davies's career—one of the happiest, most beautiful, most promising days of all days.

It began that way.

It was late when he awoke, and he opened his eyes with a feeling of well-nigh inexpressible peace and thanksgiving. So it sometimes happens when one has slept profoundly and well, and the sleeper's soul has emerged—as it may be imagined to do after a tranquil death; and the sleeper finally awakens with some dim knowledge of this higher and better life, although he may recollect no single detail of it.

The weather was bright but dulcet, reviving instantly some feeling within him originally stirred to life by old Ezra Wood. And now Davies did think of that old man with a tremor of gratitude—seeing him again not as a superannuated farmer, but as a master, or an angel, or a spirit, straight from the center of all things.

This general impression of a world made over was

strengthened when he came downstairs and happened upon Alvah in the hall. He saw a light and a tenderness in her eyes that was quite other than any light or tenderness he had seen there before.

It was something that caused him to take her in his arms as naturally, and yet as supernaturally, as if she had belonged there always. They whispered something about love and beauty.

But words were unnecessary. The whole universe was a word, and the word embraced all these ultimate things which, as they comprehended, were all the same thing anyway—truth, law, beauty, love, faith, knowledge. All facts were as clear and fragrant as the air.

Later on, when Colonel Williams appeared, he was merely another element in this cosmic harmony.

The colonel was quiet, dignified, but gracious.

Somehow he appeared at once older yet less feeble; just a shade less human, it may be, and yet very much the grand old man. He struck an odd chord in Davies's brain. For the first time since they had known each other, the colonel was reminding Davies—vaguely, in no definable way—of Ezra Wood in his mystical aspect. It was something that pleased him, deepened his love for the colonel, deep as this affection had already begun to be.

"Culbertson's gone," said Davies.

He had waited until Alvah was out of hearing.

"And the Lord liveth!" the colonel exclaimed enigmatically.

For that matter, there was nothing very revealing

in the way that they smiled at each other, except as an indication of mutual understanding.

"And now," said Dick, "I'll have to dope out a plan to return the proceeds of last night's collection. The checks will be easy. It's going to be the deuce, though, to return those nickels and pennies."

"Let the matter rest in abeyance," the colonel suggested, "until I see what can be done about it. Perhaps our friends may be willing to devote the fund to a new high-school, or a hospital." He added, irrelevantly perhaps: "There generally is a lack of community spirit in a place like this until the devil shows himself in person."

Mr. Marsh, the general agent of the insurance company, was already in the office recently occupied by Frank Tine when Davies got there. Mr. Marsh was businesslike, but he was cordial.

He went into all sorts of details concerning the business, both local and abroad, and wound up by declaring that it was his purpose to put Davies in charge of the St. Clair agency forthwith if Davies felt the call.

Did he feel the call? Did he?

With a chance, not only comparatively, but literally, to roll in wealth—run his own automobile—out through the country year after year—not only in search of new business, but in the accumulation of a larger and larger share of life!

There was a brightness in his eyes as he and Mr. Marsh shook hands on the proposition. It may have been this that caused the older man to say:

"You'll make good. For an insurance man, you know, has to be called just as much as a preacher does."

It was a prophecy. It was a hallowing touch, moreover.

And no man, as Davies subsequently reflected, can ever be very good at his job, whatever that job may be, unless he feels that in doing it he is doing something in the nature of a preacher's work.

He announced the good news when he went home at noon, and the little dinner, with just the three of them there, was in the nature of a stately banquet—a repast with music and love, both music and love furnished magically out of the atmosphere.

When it was over, and the colonel had retired for his nap, Dick and Alvah went together out into the garden where their talking wouldn't disturb him. But as a matter of fact their voices wouldn't have disturbed a wren, although Davies had so much to say.

He said most of this under the grape-arbor in the back yard, where they were as remote and embowered as they would have been on a desert island.

"Oh, Alvah, when are we to be married?"

"Whenever you say."

And Dick, explaining how he was going to make all the money in the world, and fix up this old place and make a paradise of it for the colonel for so long as the colonel should live. They left themselves out of this part of it altogether, as was natural; any place and every place was paradise for them, just then, whatever the state of disrepair.

But this home-making element of the new dispensa-

tion underwent an unexpected development in the course of the afternoon.

This was when Davies received a visit from Harold Peebles—that handsome lawyer who had bought the old homestead in a hurry as a nesting-place for himself and Tessie Fisher, *née* Wingate. Harold's mood was one of resignation underlaid with a sort of cynical melancholy. He had heard the news—about Tessie and Simp. He was willing to get rid of the Old Homestead at a sacrifice.

Dick's vision spread, enhanced by those earlier visions of his, only now made clear and logical.

He would want a country home. He would have a car. He would always crave a farm—if it were only to raise rocks and views, dreams and yet other visions.

He closed the bargain, and found that he had done better than he would have done if Frank Tine had not played him false. This became, incidentally, another germ of reason in his new philosophy—that no one can really injure any one else; that no one can injure any one but himself; and that, therefore, *if a man be all right*, everything does eventually turn out to be for the good.

It was a philosophy with a general application—which is the test of any philosophy; with an application for the whole town. For, after all, didn't St. Clair profit by old Sky-Blue's visit? It did. It lost the Beating Heart Seminary, it is true, but it gained the new hospital.

For the matter of that, the town was richer in common sense, as well; was always a little steadier after

that, not so ready to fall at the feet of the first platitudinous quack to come along, swallow the first spiritual cure-all to be shoved under its nose.

Which was something to be grateful for.

Because, after all, just as every American is America—as Alvah put it—wasn't it so in an even greater degree, that St. Clair likewise was America?

But all this is of the more or less nebulous future.

The more immediate facts are that, almost overnight, Davies became St. Clair's man-of-the-hour—the story having spread as to how he had defied the so-called Culbertson and driven the old reprobate from the town; and that Davies and Alvah did marry and live happily forever afterward—however hard it is to make a statement like that without getting accused of plagiarism.

Drive through St. Clair to-day and you'll see the name of Richard Davies spread in gilt letters across the front of a business block. And then, if you keep on out through town and along the Dartown Pike you'll see the Old Homestead—reconstructed, with a hint of luxurious well-being about it, but none the less unmistakably, still the Old Homestead.

CHAPTER LV

EPILOGUE

Came a gusty, sleety night to lower Manhattan—the Elevated rumbling, and the surface cars clanging and shrieking—clanging and shrieking no louder, however, than the garish lights and howling blacknesses of Chatham Square.

A corner of the pit!

That was what this part of the big town was on such a night.

And like shadows of the pit, all of them damned, a good many of the people thereabouts came and went—frail children, as unreactive to misery as kittens; older boys and girls, blunted to present pains by their first heady sniffs at an opiate future; and boys and girls older yet, body weary, soul weary, but forbidden to die, thus keeping up the legend of a punishment eternal.

Outside that smoky and smelly saloon which was known as the Commodore, a Salvation Army man, bareheaded, rapt of face and utterance, scattered riches more precious than pearls; but those who were headed for the Commodore passed him by as if he had been selling peanuts.

The Commodore had gone down-hill.

There had been a murder in the back room of it, and

a couple of girls had drunk carbolic acid there, and the place had been raided a number of times by the police.

Still, there were always—or yet—a number of old-timers who kept returning ever and anon, like bloated, frowzy flies.

Unclean! Unclean! But dear to the blow-fly heart!

Phil came sneaking in, like a lean cat—no longer so spick and span—shooting the drops of water from his soiled raiment as a cat would twitch water from its fur.

He spied his old friend Solly at a table and slunk over to join him.

Solly hadn't seen Phil for a long time. Solly was just back from a two months' trip out into the wilds. But if Solly had gone for his health his time must have been wasted. He was still fat, but he wasn't cherubic any more. He was very white, flabby. He had a distressing habit of twitching his hands, rubbing his knuckles against his nose.

About the only sign of a greeting that passed between them was when Solly made a sign to Eddie, the bar-boy; and presently Eddie came back with two ponies of whisky on his tray.

And Eddie stood right there, too, until he had received his money. Not a word.

They shot the stuff into them.

"Hear you been in stir," said Solly.

"Nuttin' but thirty days," said Phil with contempt. "What 'd you pull in the West?"

"Nothin' but a pair of cold feet," Solly confessed

without shame. "The bulls was houndin' me all the while I was there. I was sick. I'm sick yet."

This made Phil grin.

"You've lost your noive," he affirmed.

Solly pawed at his nose with the movement of a rabbit washing its face.

"I never had a fair deal," he complained.

"I thought you was goin' to come back with Belle," Phil sneered.

"Who—Blanche?"

"Yes; Myrtle—the kid that Chick sent out West—before he blew the town."

"Fergit it!" Solly ejaculated. "She's runnin' a restaurant in Colorado Springs, and makin' good."

"Why didn't you cop her out?"

"Who—me—her marry me? Say, when she feels like goin' double she'll take her pick. She's lookin' great, coinin' money, straight as a gut."

"Didn't you talk to her?"

"Once; but all she'd talk about was Chick. Said she owed him a debt. Wanted to know where he was, what name he was usin', said anyway she was sure he was makin' good. Remember when we was all here together last time—right here at this very table—Chick, Sky-Blue——"

There was a shaky voice from just behind them:

"Eddie! Eddie! Ask these gentlemen what they will have."

And there was old Sky-Blue himself.

"Grandpa!" cried Solly with a shadow of his old form.

But Phil grinned at the old man without reverence. He did kick out a chair for the newcomer, though, and in this the bishop seated himself with a creak and a groan. Sky-Blue was aging fast. When old men like him do let go, it's apt to be like that—no spiritual reserves to draw upon. He had lost weight. His beard showed neglect.

He announced weakly that he had come to say good-by. He was leaving shortly for Kalamazoo.

But he was the same old Sky-Blue in some respects. He bull-dozed Eddie in the process of ordering refreshments; he cursed Eddie away when Eddie sought to hang around until he got his pay.

"What was that you was sayin' about Chick?" he inquired.

"We wasn't sayin'," Solly replied. "I said that Myrtle was askin' about him out in Colorado Springs. I don't know anything more about him than I do about the man in the moon."

"Well, you never was an intellectual giant, Solly," said the bishop, with leisurely judgment. "Your friends would tell you the same thing—if you had any left."

Phil laughed. Sky-Blue eyed him.

"What was you doin' on the island?" the bishop queried. "Makin' brushes?"

"Naw!"

"Well, maybe you will the next time," said old Sky-Blue. "Be patient. It won't be long."

Solly sought to recover the spirit of sociability. He was fairly successful. He said that Myrtle had set him to thinking of Chick—thinking of Chick.

"And well you might be," the bishop affirmed. "I've been doin' it myself."

He meditated. There was a stamp of melancholy on his face even after he had got the ultimate drop of his liquor into him. But he gradually recovered himself as the medicine began to work, became more of the old Sky-Blue than ever.

He made Eddie call the proprietor, and he intimated to the proprietor that it would be good for the proprietor's soul and also his business to furnish a bottle. But as he did this he slipped a folded bill—very old and greasy and honest-feeling—into the proprietor's hand, so that the proprietor did just as Sky-Blue requested him to do.

"It was the last one I had left," said the bishop when he was alone with his friends. "The last work of poor John Schmidt, and now Schmidty's doin' time for the rest of his natural. Well, that's the way it goes!"

He started to refill Solly's glass with a trembling hand. He thought better of it. He filled his own glass and drank it off.

"Where'd you shove all them other Smitty queer bills you had?" Phil inquired with blunt cynicism.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the bishop, enjoying the liquor that still adhered to his mustache. "Most of it I got rid of up there in this here town of St. Clair I was tellin' you about. They run me out of town. Oh, they done it proper. They run me out of town. But I tell you. I kept my eye on the clock until it was just forty-five minutes ahead of train-time, and then I stuck it to 'em. I changed one of them bills in every

store in town—candy stores, cigar stores, sody-water fountains, newspaper stand; I even slipped in quite a few on private parties—mostly widders and old maids —while I was tellin' 'em good-by.

" 'God bless you, sister. Can you change a ten?'

"And them runnin' to me with their good money and the tears in their eyes!"

Sky-Blue laughed at the recollection.

It may have been that Solly was still a little peeved at the way the bishop had just passed him up in the matter of another drink. Again, Solly may have been afflicted with that exalted moral sense common to invalids.

"Why, you old crook," he said, "you ought to go to the chair for deceiving women like that."

"They didn't lose anything," the bishop rejoined with a flash of righteous indignation. "They didn't lose anything!"

"How didn't they lose anything?"

"Why, they'll be still shovin' them counterfeits around among themselves till the cows come home," said the bishop. "One in the collection-plate! Another to the butcher's little square-head! Why, them bills will be legal tender in that town fer a hundred years—nobody willin' to beef for fear of not bein' able to pass the phony bill on to the next one."

"And Chick's still there?" sneered Phil.

"He's there," said the bishop, with sudden gravity and enlightenement. "He's there. Solid, too! Solid as the Rock of Gibraltar! Tried to frighten him a little! Tried to blackmail him! Had no more chance

'n if he was the President of this grea-a-a-t country of ours!"

As Sky-Blue tossed off yet another drink he was swinging rapidly into his old familiar stride.

"Oh-h-h, it all goes to show!" he proclaimed. "Here was our Chicky up there, a pullin' the s-a-a-me line o' dope as I been a pullin' fer these past fifty year. 'Be good and you'll be happy.' 'Oh-h-h, the m-a-a-r-vulous power of pious twaddle!' And now, just see him! Behold, he is rich! He sets with the mighty! Solid as the Rock of Gilbraltar!"

Solly and Phil were listening to Sky-Blue in a species of trance. It was a quality possessed by the bishop. He could command an attention like that even in the back room of the Commodore.

Finally Solly spoke.

"Well, how do you explain," he demanded seriously, "that he got away with it and you didn't?"

Sky-Blue reflected.

"A fair question," he adjudged. "A fair question calling for a fair answer."

He fortified himself with yet another drink. He smacked his lips. He formulated his thought.

"Well, I'll tell you," said he. "The difference was this: Chick, he believed it, and I didn't." An unexpected tear dropped into his beard. A far-away look came into his eyes. "Oh-h-h, my dear young friends," he intoned, "remember this! Remember this as you go through life: If you believe it, it's so!"

THE END

BOSTON BLACKIE

BY
JACK BOYLE

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BOSTON BLACKIE

CHAPTER I

BOSTON BLACKIE!

BOSTON BLACKIE . . . in the archives of a hundred detective bureaus the name, invariably followed by a question mark, was pencilled after the records of unsolved safe-robberies of unequalled daring and skill.

The constantly recurring interrogation point was proof of the uncanny shrewdness and prevision of a crook who pitted his wits against those of organized society and gambled his all on the result of the game he played—for it was in the spirit of a man playing a vitally engrossing game against incalculable odds that Boston Blackie lived the life of crookdom. The question mark meant that the police suspected his guilt—even thought they knew it—but had no proof.

The name, Boston Blackie, was an anathema at the annual convention of police chiefs. The continually growing list of exploits attributed to him left them raging impotently at his incomparable audacity. He neither looked, worked nor lived as experience taught them a crook should. Traps innumerable had been laid for him without result. Always, it seemed, an intuitive foreknowledge of what the police would do guided him to safety. In short, Boston Blackie, safe-

cracker de luxe, was the great enigma of the harried, savagely incensed guardians of property rights.

Though detectives never guessed it, the secret of Boston Blackie's invulnerability lay in his mental attitude toward the law and those paid to uphold it. In his own mind he was not a criminal but a combatant. He had declared war upon Society and, if defeated, was ready to pay the penalty it inflicted. Undefeated, he felt the world could not hold a grudge against him. The laws of the statute books he discarded as mere "scraps of paper." He saw himself not as a law-breaker but as a law-upholder, for he lived under the rigid mandates of a crook-world code that he held more sacred than life itself. A guilty conscience proves the downfall of most prison inmates. Blackie, his conscience clear, played the game winningly with the zest of a school-boy and the joy of a gambler confidently risking great stakes.

Boston Blackie was no roystering cabaret habitue squandering the proceeds of his exploits in night-life dissipation. University trained and with a natural predilection for good literature, his pleasures were those of a gentleman of independent means with a mental trend toward the humanitarian problems of the day. His home was his place of recreation and in that home, sharing joyously the perils and pleasures of his strangely ordered life was Mary, his wife—Boston Blackie's Mary to the crook-world that looked up to them with unfeigned adulation as the chief exponents of its queerly warped creed.

Mary was Boston Blackie's best loved pal and sole confidant. She alone knew all he did and why, and, knowing, she joined in his exploits with the wholeheartedness of unquestioning love. Together they played; together they worked and always they were happy in good fortune or evil. A strange couple, so unusual in thought and life and habit that detectives, judging them by other crooks, were forever at sea.

Seated in their cozy apartment in San Francisco which for the time was their home Blackie suddenly dropped the current volume on mysticism which he had been reading and looked across the room to Mary, busy with an intricate piece of embroidery.

"We need a bit of excitement, Mary," he said with the unconcerned air of a husband about to suggest an evening at the theatre. "We'll take the Wilmerding jewel collection tonight."

"I'll drive your car myself if you're going out there," she answered with the faintest trace of womanly anxiety in her voice.

"Well, then, that's settled."

Boston Blackie resumed his reading and Mary her embroidery.

CHAPTER II

BOSTON BLACKIE'S LITTLE PAL

THE room was faintly illumined by the intermittent flame of a wood-fire slowly dying on the hearth of an open grate. The house was silent dark, seemingly deserted. Outside, the dripping San Francisco fog clung to everything in the heavy impenetrable folds that isolated the residence from its neighbors as though it stood alone in an otherwise empty world.

Inside the handsomely furnished living-room, and opposite the fire which now and then leaped up and cast his shadow in grotesque shapes against the ceiling, stood a man intently studying the paneled walls—a man with a white handkerchief masking his face and a coat that sagged under the weight of the gun slung ready for instant use beneath one of its lapels.

The man was Boston Blackie. Concealed behind the oaken panels he inspected so painstakingly was a safe in which lay the Wilmerding jewels—a famous collection.

For two generations San Franciscans had eyed them with envy. Handed down from mother to daughter they had played their part in the social warfare of the city of the Golden Gate for half a century. And Blackie was there to make them his own.

Buy the book from your Bookseller and go on with the story.

IF YOU BELIEVE IT- IT'S SO

SHEEHAN

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